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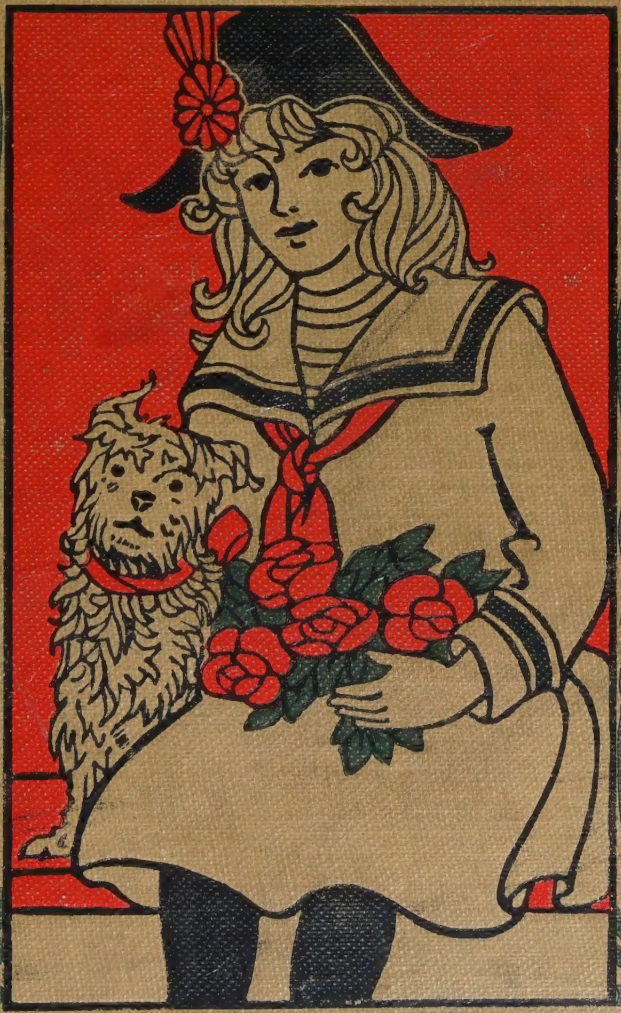

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"'Eatin' 'trawberries,' she answered coolly"

(See page 70)

The Little Colonel Stories

By ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Author of "The Little Colonel Books," "Big Brother," "Asa Holmes," "Ole Mammy's Torment," etc.

Illustrated by HAROLD MATTHEWS BRETT

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TO

ONE OF KENTUCKY'S

DEAREST LITTLE DAUGHTERS

The Little Colonel

HERSELF — THIS REMEMBRANCE

OF A HAPPY SUMMER IS

AFFECTIONATELY

INSCRIBED

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The Little Colonel

The Little Colonel Stories

The Little Colonel

CHAPTER I.

T was one of the prettiest places in all Kentucky where the Little Colonel stood that morning. She was reaching up on tiptoes, her eager little face pressed close against the iron bars of the great entrance gate that led to a fine old estate known as "Locust."

A ragged little Scotch and Skye terrier stood on its hind feet beside her, thrusting his inquisitive nose between the bars, and wagging his tasselled tail in lively approval of the scene before them.

They were looking down a long avenue that stretched for nearly a quarter

of a mile between rows of stately old locust-trees.

At the far end they could see the white pillars of a large stone house gleaming through the Virginia creeper that nearly covered it. But they could not see the old Colonel in his big chair on the porch behind the cool screen of vines.

At that very moment he had caught the rattle of wheels along the road, and had picked up his field-glass to see who was passing. It was only a coloured man jogging along in the heat and dust with a cart full of chicken-coops. The Colonel watched him drive up a lane that led to the back of the new hotel that had just been opened in this quiet country place. Then his glance fell on the two small strangers coming through his gate down the avenue toward him. One was the friskiest dog he had ever

seen in his life. The other was a child he judged to be about five years old.

Her shoes were covered with dust, and her white sunbonnet had slipped off and was hanging over her shoulders. A bunch of wild flowers she had gathered on the way hung limp and faded in her little warm hand. Her soft, light hair was cut as short as a boy's.

There was something strangely familiar about the child, especially in the erect, graceful way she walked.

Old Colonel Lloyd was puzzled. He had lived all his life in Lloydsborough, and this was the first time he had ever failed to recognize one of the neighbours' children. He knew every dog and horse, too, by sight if not by name.

Living so far from the public road did not limit his knowledge of what was going on in the world. A powerful field-glass brought every passing object

in plain view, while he was saved all annoyance of noise and dust.

"I ought to know that child as well as I know my own name," he said to himself. "But the dog is a stranger in these parts. Liveliest thing I ever set eyes on! They must have come from the hotel. Wonder what they want."

He carefully wiped the lens for a better view. When he looked again he saw that they evidently had not come to visit him.

They had stopped half-way down the avenue, and climbed up on a rustic seat to rest.

The dog sat motionless about two minutes, his red tongue hanging out as if he were completely exhausted.

Suddenly he gave a spring, and bounded away through the tall blue grass. He was back again in a moment, with a stick in his mouth. Stand-

ing up with his fore paws in the lap of his little mistress, he looked so wistfully into her face that she could not refuse this invitation for a romp.

The Colonel chuckled as they went tumbling about in the grass to find the stick which the child repeatedly tossed away.

He hitched his chair along to the other end of the porch as they kept getting farther away from the avenue.

It had been many a long year since those old locust-trees had seen a sight like that. Children never played any more under their dignified shadows.

Time had been (but they only whispered this among themselves on rare spring days like this) when the little feet chased each other up and down the long walk, as much at home as the pewees in the beeches.

Suddenly the little maid stood up

straight, and began to sniff the air, as if some delicious odour had blown across the lawn.

"Fritz," she exclaimed, in delight, "I 'mell 'trawberries!"

The Colonel, who could not hear the remark, wondered at the abrupt pause in the game. He understood it, however, when he saw them wading through the tall grass, straight to his strawberry bed. It was the pride of his heart, and the finest for miles around. The first berries of the season had been picked only the day before. Those that now hung temptingly red on the vines he intended to send to his next neighbour, to prove his boasted claim of always raising the finest and earliest fruit.

He did not propose to have his plans spoiled by these stray guests. Laying the field-glass in its accustomed place

on the little table beside his chair, he picked up his hat and strode down the walk.

Colonel Lloyd's friends all said he looked like Napoleon, or rather like Napoleon might have looked had he been born and bred a Kentuckian.

He made an imposing figure in his suit of white duck.

The Colonel always wore white from May till October.

There was a military precision about him, from his erect carriage to the cut of the little white goatee on his determined chin.

No one looking into the firm lines of his resolute face could imagine him ever abandoning a purpose or being turned aside when he once formed an opinion.

Most children were afraid of him. The darkies about the place shook in

their shoes when he frowned. They had learned from experience that "ole Marse Lloyd had a tigah of a tempah in him."

As he passed down the walk there were two mute witnesses to his old soldier life. A spur gleamed on his boot heel, for he had just returned from his morning ride, and his right sleeve hung empty.

He had won his title bravely. He had given his only son and his strong right arm to the Southern cause. That had been nearly thirty years ago.

He did not charge down on the enemy with his usual force this time. The little head, gleaming like sunshine in the strawberry patch, reminded him so strongly of a little fellow who used to follow him everywhere, — Tom, the sturdiest, handsomest boy in the county,

— Tom, whom he had been so proud of, whom he had so nearly worshipped.

Looking at this fair head bent over the vines, he could almost forget that Tom had ever outgrown his babyhood, that he had shouldered a rifle and followed him to camp, a mere boy, to be shot down by a Yankee bullet in his first battle.

The old Colonel could almost believe he had him back again, and that he stood in the midst of those old days the locusts sometimes whispered about.

He could not hear the happiest of little voices that was just then saying, "Oh, Fritz, isn't you glad we came? An' isn't you glad we've got a gran'fathah with such good 'trawberries?"

It was hard for her to put the "s" before her consonants.

As the Colonel came nearer she tossed another berry into the dog's mouth. A

twig snapped, and she raised a startled face toward him.

"Suh?" she said, timidly, for it seemed to her that the stern, piercing eyes had spoken.

"What are you doing here, child?" he asked, in a voice so much kinder than his eyes that she regained her usual self-possession at once.

"Eatin' 'trawberries," she answered, coolly.

"Who are you, anyway?" he exclaimed, much puzzled. As he asked the question his gaze happened to rest on the dog, who was peering at him through the ragged, elfish wisps of hair nearly covering its face, with eyes that were startlingly human.

"'Peak when yo'ah 'poken to, Fritz," she said, severely, at the same time popping another luscious berry into her mouth.

Fritz obediently gave a long yelp. The Colonel smiled grimly.

" What's your name? " he asked, this time looking directly at her.

" Mothah calls me her baby," was the soft-spoken reply, " but papa an' Mom Beck they calls me the Little Cun'l."

" What under the sun do they call you that for? " he roared.

" 'Cause I'm so much like you," was the startling answer.

" Like me! " fairly gasped the Colonel. " How are you like me? "

" Oh, I'm got such a vile tempah, an' I stamps my foot when I gets mad, an' gets all red in the face. An' I hollahs at folks, an' looks jus' zis way."

She drew her face down and puckered her lips into such a sullen pout that it looked as if a thunder-storm had passed over it. The next instant she smiled up at him serenely.

The Colonel laughed. "What makes you think I am like that?" he said. "You never saw me before."

"Yes, I have too," she persisted. "You's a-hangin' in a gold frame over ou' mantel."

Just then a clear, high voice was heard calling out in the road.

The child started up in alarm. "Oh, deah," she exclaimed in dismay, at sight of the stains on her white dress, where she had been kneeling on the fruit, "that's Mom Beck. Now I'll be tied up, and maybe put to bed for runnin' away again. But the berries is mighty nice," she added, politely. "Good mawnin', suh. Fritz, we mus' be goin' now."

The voice was coming nearer.

"I'll walk down to the gate with you," said the Colonel, anxious to learn something more about his little guest.

"Oh, you'd bettah not, suh!" she cried in alarm. "Mom Beck doesn't like you a bit. She just hates you! She's goin' to give you a piece of her mind the next time she sees you. I heard her tell Aunt Nervy so."

There was as much real distress in the child's voice as if she were telling him of a promised flogging.

"Lloyd! Aw, Lloy-eed!" the call came again.

A neat-looking coloured woman glanced in at the gate as she was passing by, and then stood still in amazement. She had often found her little charge playing along the roadside or hiding behind trees, but she had never before known her to pass through any one's gate.

As the name came floating down to him through the clear air, a change came over the Colonel's stern face. He

stooped over the child. His hand trembled as he put it under her soft chin and raised her eyes to his.

"Lloyd, Lloyd!" he repeated, in a puzzled way. "Can it be possible? There certainly is a wonderful resemblance. You have my little Tom's hair, and only my baby Elizabeth ever had such hazel eyes."

He caught her up in his one arm, and strode on to the gate, where the coloured woman stood.

"Why, Becky, is that you?" he cried, recognizing an old, trusted servant who had lived at Locust in his wife's lifetime.

Her only answer was a sullen nod.

"Whose child is this?" he asked, eagerly, without seeming to notice her defiant looks. "Tell me if you can."

"How can I tell you, suh," she de-

manded, indignantly, "when you have fo'bidden even her name to be spoken befo' you?"

A harsh look came into the Colonel's eyes. He put the child hastily down, and pressed his lips together.

"Don't tie my sunbonnet, Mom Beck," she begged. Then she waved her hand with an engaging smile.

"Good-bye, suh," she said, graciously. "We've had a mighty nice time!"

The Colonel took off his hat with his usual courtly bow, but he spoke no word in reply.

When the last flutter of her dress had disappeared around the bend of the road, he walked slowly back toward the house.

Half-way down the long avenue where she had stopped to rest, he sat down on the same rustic seat. He could feel her soft little fingers resting on his

neck, where they had lain when he carried her to the gate.

A very un-Napoleonlike mist blurred his sight for a moment. It had been so long since such a touch had thrilled him, so long since any caress had been given him.

More than a score of years had gone by since Tom had been laid in a soldier's grave, and the years that Elizabeth had been lost to him seemed almost a lifetime.

And this was Elizabeth's little daughter. Something very warm and sweet seemed to surge across his heart as he thought of the Little Colonel. He was glad, for a moment, that they called her that; glad that his only grandchild looked enough like himself for others to see the resemblance.

But the feeling passed as he remembered that his daughter had married

against his wishes, and he had closed his doors for ever against her.

The old bitterness came back redoubled in its force.

The next instant he was stamping down the avenue, roaring for Walker, his body-servant, in such a tone that the cook's advice was speedily taken: "Bettah hump yo'self outen dis heah kitchen befo' de ole tigah gits to lashin' roun' any pearter."

CHAPTER II.

OM BECK carried the ironing-board out of the hot kitchen, set the irons off the stove, and then tiptoed out to the side porch of the little cottage.

"Is yo' head feelin' any bettah, honey?" she said to the pretty, girlish-looking woman lying in the hammock. "I promised to step up to the hotel this evenin' to see one of the chambah-maids. I thought I'd take the Little Cun'l along with me if you was willin'. She's always wild to play with Mrs. Wyford's children up there."

"Yes, I'm better, Becky," was the

languid reply. "Put a clean dress on Lloyd if you are going to take her out."

Mrs. Sherman closed her eyes again, thinking gratefully, "Dear, faithful old Becky! What a comfort she has been all my life, first as my nurse, and now as Lloyd's! She is worth her weight in gold!"

The afternoon shadows were stretching long across the grass when Mom Beck led the child up the green slope in front of the hotel.

The Little Colonel had danced along so gaily with Fritz that her cheeks glowed like wild roses. She made a quaint little picture with such short sunny hair and dark eyes shining out from under the broad-brimmed white hat she wore.

Several ladies who were sitting on the shady piazza, busy with their embroidery, noticed her admiringly.

"It's Elizabeth Lloyd's little daughter," one of them explained. "Don't you remember what a scene there was some years ago when she married a New York man? Sherman, I believe, his name was, Jack Sherman. He was a splendid fellow, and enormously wealthy. Nobody could say a word against him, except that he was a Northerner. That was enough for the old Colonel, though. He hates Yankees like poison. He stormed and swore, and forbade Elizabeth ever coming in his sight again. He had her room locked up, and not a soul on the place ever dares mention her name in his hearing."

The Little Colonel sat down demurely on the piazza steps to wait for the children. The nurse had not finished dressing them for the evening.

She amused herself by showing Fritz

the pictures in an illustrated weekly. It was not long until she began to feel that the ladies were talking about her. She had lived among older people so entirely that her thoughts were much deeper than her baby speeches would lead one to suppose.

She understood dimly, from what she had heard the servants say, that there was some trouble between her mother and grandfather. Now she heard it rehearsed from beginning to end. She could not understand what they meant by "bank failures" and "unfortunate investments," but she understood enough to know that her father had lost nearly all his money, and had gone West to make more.

Mrs. Sherman had moved from their elegant New York home two weeks ago to this little cottage in Lloydsborough that her mother had left her. Instead

of the houseful of servants they used to have, there was only faithful Mom Beck to do everything.

There was something magnetic in the child's eyes.

Mrs. Wyford shrugged her shoulders uneasily as she caught their piercing gaze fixed on her.

"I do believe that little witch understood every word I said," she exclaimed.

"Oh, certainly not," was the reassuring answer. "She's such a little thing."

But she had heard it all, and understood enough to make her vaguely unhappy. Going home she did not frisk along with Fritz, but walked soberly by Mom Beck's side, holding tight to the friendly black hand.

"We'll go through the woods," said Mom Beck, lifting her over the fence. "It's not so long that way."

As they followed the narrow, strag-

gling path into the cool dusk of the woods, she began to sing. The crooning chant was as mournful as a funeral dirge.

"The clouds hang heavy, an' it's gwine to rain.
Fa'well, my dyin' friends.
I'm gwine to lie in the silent tomb.
Fa'well, my dyin' friends."

A muffled little sob made her stop and look down in surprise.

"Why, what's the mattah, honey?" she exclaimed. "Did Emma Louise make you mad? Or is you cryin' 'cause you're so ti'ed? Come! Ole Becky'll tote her baby the rest of the way."

She picked the light form up in her arms, and, pressing the troubled little face against her shoulder, resumed her walk and her song.

"It's a world of trouble we're travellin' through.
Fa'well, my dyin' friends."

"Oh, don't, Mom Beck," sobbed the child, throwing her arms around the woman's neck, and crying as though her heart would break.

"Land sakes, what is the mattah?" she asked, in alarm. She sat down on a mossy log, took off the white hat, and looked into the flushed, tearful face.

"Oh, it makes me so lonesome when you sing that way," wailed the Little Colonel. "I just can't 'tand it! Mom Beck, is my mothah's heart all broken? Is that why she is sick so much, and will it kill her suah 'nuff?"

"Who's been tellin' you such nonsense?" asked the woman, sharply.

"Some ladies at the hotel were talkin' about it. They said that gran'fathah didn't love her any moah, an' it was just a-killin' her." Mom Beck frowned fiercely.

The child's grief was so deep and in-

tense that she did not know just how to quiet her. Then she said, decidedly, "Well, if that's all that's a-troublin' you, you can jus' get down an' walk home on yo' own laigs. Yo' mamma's a-grievin' 'cause yo' papa has to be away all the time. She's all wo'n out, too, with the work of movin', when she's nevah been used to doin' anything. But her heart isn't broke any moah'n my neck is."

The positive words and the decided toss Mom Beck gave her head settled the matter for the Little Colonel. She wiped her eyes and stood up much relieved.

"Don't you nevah go to worryin' 'bout what you heahs," continued the woman. "I tell you p'intedly you cyarnt nevah b'lieve what you heahs."

"Why doesn't gran'fathah love my mothah?" asked the child, as they came

in sight of the cottage. She had puzzled over the knotty problem all the way home. "How can papas not love their little girls?"

"'Cause he's stubbo'n," was the unsatisfactory answer. "All the Lloyds is. Yo' mamma's stubbo'n, an' you's stubbo'n —"

"I'm not!" shrieked the Little Colonel, stamping her foot. "You sha'n't call me names!"

Then she saw a familiar white hand waving to her from the hammock, and she broke away from Mom Beck with very red cheeks and very bright eyes.

Cuddled close in her mother's arms, she had a queer feeling that she had grown a great deal older in that short afternoon.

Maybe she had. For the first time in her little life she kept her troubles to herself, and did not once mention the

thought that was uppermost in her mind.

"Yo' great-aunt Sally Tylah is comin' this mawnin'," said Mom Beck, the day after their visit to the hotel. "Do fo' goodness' sake keep yo'self clean. I'se got too many spring chickens to dress to think 'bout dressin' you up again."

"Did I evah see her befo'?" questioned the Little Colonel.

"Why, yes, the day we moved heah. Don't you know she came and stayed so long, and the rockah broke off the little white rockin'-chair when she sat down in it?"

"Oh, now I know!" laughed the child. "She's the big fat one with curls hangin' round her yeahs like shavin's. I don't like her, Mom Beck. She keeps a-kissin' me all the time, an' a-'queezin' me, an' tellin' me to sit on her lap an'

be a little lady. Mom Beck, I de'pise to be a little lady."

There was no answer to her last remark. Mom Beck had stepped into the pantry for more eggs for the cake she was making.

"Fritz," said the Little Colonel, "yo' great-aunt Sally Tylah's comin' this mawnin', an' if you don't want to say 'howdy' to her you'll have to come with me."

A few minutes later a resolute little figure squeezed between the palings of the garden fence down by the gooseberry bushes.

"Now walk on your tiptoes, Fritz!" commanded the Little Colonel, "else somebody will call us back."

Mom Beck, busy with her extra baking, supposed she was with her mother on the shady, vine-covered porch.

She would not have been singing

quite so gaily if she could have seen half a mile up the road.

The Little Colonel was sitting in the weeds by the railroad track, deliberately taking off her shoes and stockings.

"Just like a little niggah," she said, delightedly, as she stretched out her bare feet. "Mom Beck says I ought to know bettah. But it does feel so good!"

No telling how long she might have sat there enjoying the forbidden pleasure of dragging her rosy toes through the warm dust, if she had not heard a horse's hoof-beats coming rapidly along.

"Fritz, it's gran'fathah," she whispered, in alarm, recognizing the erect figure of the rider in its spotless suit of white duck.

"Sh! lie down in the weeds, quick! Lie down, I say!"

They both made themselves as flat as possible, and lay there panting with the exertion of keeping still.

Presently the Little Colonel raised her head cautiously.

"Oh, he's gone down that lane!" she exclaimed. "Now you can get up." After a moment's deliberation she asked, "Fritz, would you rathah have some 'trawberries an' be tied up fo' runnin' away, or not be tied up and not have any of those nice tas'en 'trawberries?"

CHAPTER III.

TWO hours later, Colonel Lloyd, riding down the avenue under the locusts, was surprised by a novel sight on his stately front steps.

Three little darkies and a big flop-eared hound were crouched on the bottom step, looking up at the Little Colonel, who sat just above them.

She was industriously stirring something in an old rusty pan with a big, battered spoon.

"Now, May Lilly," she ordered, speaking to the largest and blackest of the group, "you run an' find some nice 'mooth pebbles to put in for raisins.

Henry Clay, you go get me some moah sand. This is 'most too wet."

"Here, you little pickaninnies!" roared the Colonel, as he recognized the cook's children. "What did I tell you about playing around here, tracking dirt all over my premises? You just chase back to the cabin where you belong!"

The sudden call startled Lloyd so that she dropped the pan, and the great mud pie turned upside down on the white steps.

"Well, you're a pretty sight!" said the Colonel, as he glanced with disgust from her soiled dress and muddy hands to her bare feet.

He had been in a bad humour all morning. The sight of the steps covered with sand and muddy tracks gave him an excuse to give vent to his cross feelings.

It was one of his theories that a little

girl should always be kept as fresh and dainty as a flower. He had never seen his own little daughter in such a plight as this, and she had never been allowed to step outside of her own room without her shoes and stockings.

"What does your mother mean," he cried, savagely, "by letting you run barefooted around the country just like poor white trash? An' what are you playing with low-flung niggers for? Haven't you ever been taught any better? I suppose it's some of your father's miserable Yankee notions."

May Lilly, peeping around the corner of the house, rolled her frightened eyes from one angry face to the other. The same temper that glared from the face of the man, sitting erect in his saddle, seemed to be burning in the eyes of the child, who stood so defiantly before him.

The same kind of scowl drew their eyebrows together darkly.

"Don't you talk that way to me," cried the Little Colonel, trembling with a wrath she did not know how to express.

Suddenly she stooped, and snatching both hands full of mud from the overturned pie, flung it wildly over the spotless white coat.

Colonel Lloyd gasped with astonishment. It was the first time in his life he had ever been openly defied. The next moment his anger gave way to amusement.

"By George!" he chuckled, admiringly. "The little thing has got spirit, sure enough. She's a Lloyd through and through. So that's why they call her the 'Little Colonel,' is it?"

There was a tinge of pride in the look he gave her haughty little head and flashing eyes.

"There, there, child!" he said, soothingly. "I didn't mean to make you mad, when you were good enough to come and see me. It isn't often I have a little lady like you pay me a visit."

"I didn't come to see you, suh," she answered, indignantly, as she started toward the gate. "I came to see May Lilly. But I nevah would have come inside yo' gate if I'd known you was goin' to hollah at me an' be so cross."

She was walking off with the air of an offended queen, when the Colonel remembered that if he allowed her to go away in that mood she would probably never set foot on his grounds again. Her display of temper had interested him immensely.

Now that he had laughed off his ill humour, he was anxious to see what other traits of character she possessed.

. He wheeled his horse across the walk to bar her way, and quickly dismounted.

"Oh, now, wait a minute," he said, in a coaxing tone. "Don't you want a nice big saucer of strawberries and cream before you go? Walker's picking some now. And you haven't seen my hothouse. It's just full of the loveliest flowers you ever saw. You like roses, don't you, and pinks and lilies and pansies?"

He saw he had struck the right chord as soon as he mentioned the flowers. The sullen look vanished as if by magic. Her face changed as suddenly as an April day.

"Oh, yes!" she cried, with a beaming smile. "I loves 'm bettah than anything!"

He tied his horse, and led the way to the conservatory. He opened the door for her to pass through, and then

watched her closely to see what impression it would make on her. He had expected a delighted exclamation of surprise, for he had good reason to be proud of his rare plants. They were arranged with a true artist's eye for colour and effect.

She did not say a word for a moment, but drew a long breath, while the delicate pink in her cheeks deepened and her eyes lighted up. Then she began going slowly from flower to flower, laying her face against the cool, velvety purple of the pansies, touching the roses with her lips, and tilting the white lily-cups to look into their golden depths.

As she passed from one to another as lightly as a butterfly might have done, she began chanting in a happy undertone.

Ever since she had learned to talk she had a quaint little way of singing to

herself. All the names that pleased her fancy she strung together in a crooning melody of her own.

There was no special tune. It sounded happy, although nearly always in a minor key.

"Oh, the jonquils an' the lilies!" she sang. "All white an' gold an' yellow. Oh, they're all a-smilin' at me, an' a-sayin' howdy! howdy!"

She was so absorbed in her intense enjoyment that she forgot all about the old Colonel. She was wholly unconscious that he was watching or listening.

"She really does love them," he thought, complacently. "To see her face one would think she had found a fortune."

It was another bond between them.

After awhile he took a small basket from the wall, and began to fill it with his choicest blooms.

" You shall have these to take home," he said. " Now come into the house and get your strawberries."

She followed him reluctantly, turning back several times for one more long sniff of the delicious fragrance.

She was not at all like the Colonel's ideal of what a little girl should be, as she sat in one of the high, stiff chairs, enjoying her strawberries. Her dusty little toes wriggled around in the curls on Fritz's back, as she used him for a footstool. Her dress was draggled and dirty, and she kept leaning over to give the dog berries and cream from the spoon she was eating with herself.

He forgot all this, however, when she began to talk to him.

" My great-aunt Sally Tylah is to ou' house this mawnin'," she announced, confidentially. " That's why we came

off. Do you know my Aunt Sally Tylah?"

"Well, slightly!" chuckled the Colonel. "She was my wife's half-sister. So you don't like her, eh? Well, I don't like her either."

He threw back his head and laughed heartily. The more the child talked the more entertaining he found her. He did not remember when he had ever been so amused before as he was by this tiny counterpart of himself.

When the last berry had vanished, she slipped down from the tall chair.

"Do you 'pose it's very late?" she asked, in an anxious voice. "Mom Beck will be comin' for me soon."

"Yes, it is nearly noon," he answered. "It didn't do much good to run away from your Aunt Tyler; she'll see you after all."

"Well, she can't 'queeze me an' kiss

me, 'cause I've been naughty, an' I'll be put to bed like I was the othah day, just as soon as I get home. I 'most wish I was there now," she sighed. " It's so fa' an' the sun's so hot. I lost my sunbonnet when I was comin' heah, too."

Something in the tired, dirty face prompted the old Colonel to say, " Well, my horse hasn't been put away yet. I'll take you home on Maggie Boy."

The next moment he repented making such an offer, thinking what the neighbours might say if they should meet him on the road with Elizabeth's child in his arm.

But it was too late. He could not unclasp the trusting little hand that was slipped in his. He could not cloud the happiness of the eager little face by retracting his promise.

He swung himself into the saddle, with her in front.

Then he put his one arm around her with a firm clasp, as he reached forward to take the bridle.

"You couldn't take Fritz on behin', could you?" she asked, anxiously. "He's mighty ti'ed too."

"No," said the Colonel, with a laugh. "Maggie Boy might object and throw us all off."

Hugging her basket of flowers close in her arms, she leaned her head against him contentedly as they cantered down the avenue.

"Look!" whispered all the locusts, waving their hands to each other excitedly. "Look! The master has his own again. The dear old times are coming back to us."

"How the trees blow!" exclaimed the child, looking up at the green arch overhead. "See! They's all a-noddin' to each othah."

"We'll have to get my shoes an' 'tockin's," she said, presently, when they were nearly home. "They're in that fence cawnah behin' a log."

The Colonel obediently got down and handed them to her. As he mounted again he saw a carriage coming toward them. He recognized one of his nearest neighbours. Striking the astonished Maggie Boy with his spur, he turned her across the railroad track, down the steep embankment, and into an unfrequented lane.

"This road is just back of your garden," he said. "Can you get through the fence if I take you there?"

"That's the way we came out," was the answer. "See that hole where the palin's are off?"

Just as he was about to lift her down, she put one arm around his neck, and kissed him softly on the cheek.

"Good-bye, gran'fatha'," she said, in her most winning way. "I've had a mighty nice time." Then she added, in a lower tone, "'Kuse me fo' throwin' mud on yo' coat."

He held her close a moment, thinking nothing had ever before been half so sweet as the way she called him grandfather.

From that moment his heart went out to her as it had to little Tom and Elizabeth. It made no difference if her mother had forfeited his love. It made no difference if Jack Sherman was her father, and that the two men heartily hated each other.

It was his own little grandchild he held in his arms.

She had sealed the relationship with a trusting kiss.

"Child," he said, huskily, "you will come and see me again, won't you, no

matter if they do tell you not to? You shall have all the flowers and berries you want, and you can ride Maggie Boy as often as you please."

She looked up into his face. It was very familiar to her. She had looked at his portrait often, unconsciously recognizing a kindred spirit that she longed to know.

Her ideas of grandfathers, gained from stories and observation, led her to class them with fairy godmothers. She had always wished for one.

The day they moved to Lloydsborough, Locust had been pointed out to her as her grandfather's home. From that time on she slipped away with Fritz on every possible occasion to peer through the gate, hoping for a glimpse of him.

"Yes, I'll come suah!" she promised. "I likes you just lots, gran'fathah!"

He watched her scramble through the hole in the fence. Then he turned his horse's head slowly homeward.

A scrap of white lying on the grass attracted his attention as he neared the gate.

"It's the lost sunbonnet," he said, with a smile. He carried it into the house, and hung it on the hat-rack in the wide front hall.

"Ole marse is crosser'n two sticks," growled Walker to the cook at dinner. "There ain't no livin' with him. What do you s'pose is the mattah?"

CHAPTER IV.

OM BECK was busy putting lunch on the table when the Little Colonel looked in at the kitchen door.

So she did not see a little tramp, carrying her shoes in one hand, and a basket in the other, who paused there a moment. But when she took up the pan of beaten biscuit she was puzzled to find that several were missing.

"It beats my time," she said, aloud. "The parrot couldn't have reached them, an' Lloyd an' the dog have been in the pa'lah all mawnin'. Somethin'

has jus' natch'ly done sperrited 'em away."

Fritz was gravely licking his lips, and the Little Colonel had her mouth full, when they suddenly made their appearance on the front porch.

Aunt Sally Tyler gave a little shriek, and stopped rocking.

"Why, Lloyd Sherman!" gasped her mother, in dismay. "Where have you been? I thought you were with Becky all the time. I was sure I heard you singing out there a little while ago."

"I've been to see my gran'fathah," said the child, speaking very fast. "I made mud pies on his front 'teps, an' we both of us got mad, an' I throwed mud on him, an' he gave me some 'trawberries an' all these flowers, an' brought me home on Maggie Boy."

She stopped out of breath.

Mrs. Tyler and her niece exchanged astonished glances.

"But, baby, how could you disgrace mother so by going up there looking like a dirty little beggar?"

"He didn't care," replied Lloyd, calmly. "He made me promise to come again, no mattah if you all did tell me not to."

Just then Becky announced that lunch was ready, and carried the child away to make her presentable.

To Lloyd's great surprise she was not put to bed, but was allowed to go to the table as soon as she was dressed. It was not long until she had told every detail of the morning's experience.

While she was taking her afternoon nap, the two ladies sat out on the porch, gravely discussing all she had told them.

"It doesn't seem right for me to allow her to go there," said Mrs. Sher-

man, "after the way papa has treated us. I can never forgive him for all the terrible things he has said about Jack, and I know Jack can never be friends with him on account of what he has said about me. He has been so harsh and unjust that I don't want my little Lloyd to have anything to do with him. I wouldn't for worlds have him think that I encouraged her going there."

"Well, yes, I know," answered her aunt, slowly. "But there are some things to consider besides your pride, Elizabeth. There's the child herself, you know. Now that Jack has lost so much, and your prospects are so uncertain, you ought to think of her interests. It would be a pity for Locust to go to strangers when it has been in your family for so many generations. That's what it certainly will do unless something turns up to interfere. Old Judge

Woodard told me himself that your father had made a will, leaving everything he owns to some medical institution. Imagine Locust being turned into a sanitarium or a training-school for nurses!"

"Dear old place!" said Mrs. Sherman, with tears in her eyes. "No one ever had a happier childhood than I passed under these old locusts. Every tree seems like a friend. I would be glad for Lloyd to enjoy the place as I did."

"I'd let her go as much as she pleases, Elizabeth. She's so much like the old Colonel that they ought to understand each other, and get along capitally. Who knows, it might end in you all making up some day."

Mrs. Sherman raised her head haughtily. "No, indeed, Aunt Sally. I can forgive and forget much, but you

are greatly mistaken if you think I can go to such lengths as that. He closed his doors against me with a curse, for no reason on earth but that the man I loved was born north of the Mason and Dixon line. There never was a nobler man living than Jack, and papa would have seen it if he hadn't deliberately shut his eyes and refused to look at him. He was just prejudiced and stubborn."

Aunt Sally said nothing, but her thoughts took the shape of Mom Beck's declaration, "The Lloyds is all stubbo'n."

"I wouldn't go through his gate now if he got down on his knees and begged me," continued Elizabeth, hotly.

"It's too bad," exclaimed her aunt; "he was always so perfectly devoted to 'little daughter,' as he used to call you. I don't like him myself. We never could get along together at all, because he is

so high-strung and overbearing. But I know it would have made your poor mother mighty unhappy if she could have foreseen all this."

Elizabeth sat with the tears dropping down on her little white hands, as her aunt proceeded to work on her sympathies in every way she could think of.

Presently Lloyd came out all fresh and rosy from her long nap, and went to play in the shade of the great beech-trees that guarded the cottage.

"I never saw a child with such influence over animals," said her mother, as Lloyd came around the house with the parrot perched on the broom she was carrying. "She'll walk right up to any strange dog and make friends with it, no matter how savage-looking it is. And there's Polly, so old and cross that she screams and scolds dreadfully if any of us go near her. But Lloyd

dresses her up in doll's clothes, puts paper bonnets on her, and makes her just as uncomfortable as she pleases. Look! that is one of her favourite amusements."

The Little Colonel squeezed the parrot into a tiny doll carriage, and began to trundle it back and forth as fast as she could run.

"Ha! ha!" screamed the bird. "Polly is a lady! Oh, Lordy! I'm so happy!"

"She caught that from the washerwoman," laughed Mrs. Sherman. "I should think the poor thing would be dizzy from whirling around so fast."

"Quit that, chillun; stop yo' fussin'," screamed Polly, as Lloyd grabbed her up and began to pin a shawl around her neck. She clucked angrily, but never once attempted to snap at the dimpled fingers that squeezed her tight.

Suddenly, as if her patience was completely exhausted, she uttered a disdainful "Oh, pshaw!" and flew up into an old cedar-tree.

"Mothah! Polly won't play with me any moah," shrieked the child, flying into a rage. She stamped and scowled and grew red in the face. Then she began beating the trunk of the tree with the old broom she had been carrying.

"Did you ever see anything so much like the old Colonel?" said Mrs. Tyler, in astonishment. "I wonder if she acted that way this morning."

"I don't doubt it at all," answered Mrs. Sherman. "She'll be over it in just a moment. These little spells never last long."

Mrs. Sherman was right. In a few moments Lloyd came up the walk, singing.

"I wish you'd tell me a pink story,"

she said, coaxingly, as she leaned against her mother's knee.

"Not now, dear; don't you see that I am busy talking to Aunt Sally? Run and ask Mom Beck for one."

"What on earth does she mean by a pink story?" asked Mrs. Tyler.

"Oh, she is so fond of colours. She is always asking for a pink or a blue or a white story. She wants everything in the story tinged with whatever colour she chooses,—dresses, parasols, flowers, sky, even the icing on the cakes and the paper on the walls."

"What an odd little thing she is!" exclaimed Mrs. Tyler. "Isn't she lots of company for you?"

She need not have asked that question if she could have seen them that evening, sitting together in the early twilight.

Lloyd was in her mother's lap, lean-

ing her head against her shoulder as they rocked slowly back and forth on the dark porch.

There was an occasional rattle of wheels along the road, a twitter of sleepy birds, a distant croaking of frogs.

Mom Beck's voice floated in from the kitchen, where she was stepping briskly around.

"Oh, the clouds hang heavy, an' it's gwine to rain.
Fa'well, my dyin' friends."

she sang.

Lloyd put her arms closer around her mother's neck.

"Let's talk about Papa Jack," she said. "What you 'pose he's doin' now, 'way out West?"

Elizabeth, feeling like a tired, homesick child herself, held her close, and was comforted as she listened to the

sweet little voice talking about the absent father.

The moon came up after awhile, and streamed in through the vines of the porch. The hazel eyes slowly closed as Elizabeth began to hum an old-time negro lullaby.

"Wondah if she'll run away to-morrow," whispered Mom Beck, as she came out to carry her in the house.

"Who'd evah think now, lookin' at her pretty, innocent face, that she could be so naughty? Bless her little soul!"

The kind old black face was laid lovingly a moment against the fair, soft cheek of the Little Colonel. Then she lifted her in her strong arms, and carried her gently away to bed.

CHAPTER V.

UMMER lingers long among the Kentucky hills. Each passing day seemed fairer than the last to the Little Colonel, who had never before known anything of country life.

Roses climbed up and almost hid the small white cottage. Red birds sang in the woodbine. Squirrels chattered in the beeches. She was out-of-doors all day long.

Sometimes she spent hours watching the ants carry away the sugar she sprinkled for them. Sometimes she caught flies for an old spider that had his den under the porch steps.

"He is an ogah" (ogre), she explained to Fritz. "He's bewitched me so's I have to kill whole families of flies for him to eat."

She was always busy and always happy.

Before June was half over it got to be a common occurrence for Walker to ride up to the gate on the Colonel's horse. The excuse was always to have a passing word with Mom Beck. But before he rode away, the Little Colonel was generally mounted in front of him. It was not long before she felt almost as much at home at Locust as she did at the cottage.

The neighbours began to comment on it after awhile. "He will surely make up with Elizabeth at this rate," they said. But at the end of the summer the father and daughter had not even had a passing glimpse of each other.

One day, late in September, as the Little Colonel clattered up and down the hall with her grandfather's spur buckled on her tiny foot, she called back over her shoulder: "Papa Jack's comin' home to-morrow."

The Colonel paid no attention.

"I say," she repeated, "Papa Jack's comin' home to-morrow."

"Well," was the gruff response. "Why couldn't he stay where he was? I suppose you won't want to come here any more after he gets back."

"No, I 'pose not," she answered, so carelessly that he was conscious of a very jealous feeling.

"Chilluns always like to stay with their fathahs when they's nice as my Papa Jack is."

The old man growled something behind his newspaper that she did not hear. He would have been glad to

choke this man who had come between him and his only child, and he hated him worse than ever when he realized what a large place he held in Lloyd's little heart.

She did not go back to Locust the next day, nor for weeks after that.

She was up almost as soon as Mom Beck next morning, thoroughly enjoying the bustle of preparation.

She had a finger in everything, from polishing the silver to turning the ice-cream freezer.

Even Fritz was scrubbed till he came out of his bath with his curls all white and shining. He was proud of himself, from his silky bangs to the tip of his tasselled tail.

Just before train time, the Little Colonel stuck his collar full of late pink roses, and stood back to admire the effect. Her mother came to the door,

dressed for the evening. She wore an airy-looking dress of the palest, softest blue. There was a white rosebud caught in her dark hair. A bright colour, as fresh as Lloyd's own, tinged her cheeks, and the glad light in her brown eyes made them unusually brilliant.

Lloyd jumped up and threw her arms about her. "Oh, mothah," she cried, "you an' Fritz is so bu'ful!"

The engine whistled up the road at the crossing. "Come, we have just time to get to the station," said Mrs. Sherman, holding out her hand.

They went through the gate, down the narrow path that ran beside the dusty road. The train had just stopped in front of the little station when they reached it.

A number of gentlemen, coming out from the city to spend Sunday at the hotel, came down the steps.

They glanced admiringly from the beautiful, girlish face of the mother to the happy child dancing impatiently up and down at her side. They could not help smiling at Fritz as he frisked about in his imposing rose-collar.

"Why, where's Papa Jack?" asked Lloyd, in distress, as passenger after passenger stepped down. "Isn't he goin' to come?"

The tears were beginning to gather in her eyes, when she saw him in the door of the car; not hurrying along to meet them as he always used to come, so full of life and vigour, but leaning heavily on the porter's shoulder, looking very pale and weak.

Lloyd looked up at her mother, from whose face every particle of colour had faded. Mrs. Sherman gave a low, frightened cry as she sprang forward to meet him.

"Oh, Jack! what is the matter? What has happened to you?" she exclaimed, as he took her in his arms. The train had gone on, and they were left alone on the platform.

"Just a little sick spell," he answered, with a smile. "We had a fire out at the mines, and I overtaxed myself some. I've had fever ever since, and it has pulled me down considerably."

"I must send somebody for a carriage," she said, looking around anxiously.

"No, indeed," he protested. "It's only a few steps; I can walk it as well as not. The sight of you and the baby has made me stronger already."

He sent a coloured boy on ahead with his valise, and they walked slowly up the path, with Fritz running wildly around them, barking a glad welcome.

"How sweet and homelike it all

looks!" he said, as he stepped into the hall, where Mom Beck was just lighting the lamps. Then he sank down on the couch, completely exhausted, and wearily closed his eyes.

The Little Colonel looked at his white face in alarm. All the gladness seemed to have been taken out of the home-coming.

Her mother was busy trying to make him comfortable, and paid no attention to the disconsolate little figure wandering about the house alone. Mom Beck had gone for the doctor.

The supper was drying up in the warming-oven. The ice-cream was melting in the freezer. Nobody seemed to care. There was no one to notice the pretty table with its array of flowers and cut glass and silver.

When Mom Beck came back, Lloyd ate all by herself, and then sat out on

the kitchen door-step while the doctor made his visit.

She was just going mournfully off to bed with an aching lump in her throat, when her mother opened the door.

"Come tell papa good-night," she said. "He's lots better now."

She climbed up on the bed beside him, and buried her face on his shoulder to hide the tears she had been trying to keep back all evening.

"How the child has grown!" he exclaimed. "Do you notice, Beth, how much plainer she talks? She does not seem at all like the baby I left last spring. Well, she'll soon be six years old, — a real little woman. She'll be papa's little comfort."

The ache in her throat was all gone after that. She romped with Fritz all the time she was undressing.

Papa Jack was worse next morning.

It was hard for Lloyd to keep quiet when the late September sunshine was so gloriously yellow and the whole outdoors seemed so wide awake.

She tiptoed out of the darkened room where her father lay, and swung on the front gate until she saw the doctor riding up on his bay horse. It seemed to her that the day never would pass.

Mom Beck, rustling around in her best dress ready for church, that afternoon, took pity on the lonesome child.

"Go get yo' best hat, honey," she said, "an' I'll take you with me."

It was one of the Little Colonel's greatest pleasures to be allowed to go to the coloured church.

She loved to listen to the singing, and would sit perfectly motionless while the sweet voices blended like the chords of some mighty organ as they sent the old hymns rolling heavenward.

Service had already commenced by the time they took their seats. Nearly everybody in the congregation was swaying back and forth in time to the mournful melody of "Sinnah, sinnah, where's you boun'?"

One old woman across the aisle began clapping her hands together, and repeated in a singsong tone, "Oh, Lordy! I'm so happy!"

"Why, that's just what our parrot says," exclaimed Lloyd, so much surprised that she spoke right out loud.

Mom Beck put her handkerchief over her mouth, and a general smile went around.

After that the child was very quiet until the time came to take the collection. She always enjoyed this part of the service more than anything else. Instead of passing baskets around, each

person was invited to come forward and lay his offering on the table.

Woolly heads wagged, and many feet kept time to the tune:

"Oh! I'se boun' to git to glory.
Hallelujah! Le' me go!"

The Little Colonel proudly marched up with Mom Beck's contribution, and then watched the others pass down the aisle. One young girl in a gorgeously trimmed dress paraded up to the table several times, singing at the top of her voice.

"Look at that good-fo'-nothin' Lize Richa'ds," whispered Mom Beck's nearest neighbour, with a sniff. "She done got a nickel changed into pennies so she could ma'ch up an' show herself five times."

It was nearly sundown when they started home. A tall coloured man,

wearing a high silk hat and carrying a gold-headed cane, joined them on the way out.

"Howdy, Sistah Po'tah," he said, gravely shaking hands. "That was a fine disco'se we had the pleasuah of listenin' to this evenin'."

"'Deed it was, Brothah Fostah," she answered. "How's all up yo' way?"

The Little Colonel, running on after a couple of white butterflies, paid no attention to the conversation until she heard her own name mentioned.

"Mistah Sherman came home last night, I heah."

"Yes, but not to stay long, I'm afraid. He's a mighty sick man, if I'm any judge. He's down with fevah, — regulah typhoid. He doesn't look to me like he's long for this world. What's to become of poah Miss 'Lizabeth if that's the case, is moah'n I know."

"We mustn't cross the bridge till we come to it, Sistah Po'tah," he suggested.

"I know that; but a lookin'-glass broke yeste'day mawnin' when nobody had put fingah on it. An' his picture fell down off the wall while I was sweepin' the pa'lah. Pete said his dawg done howl all night last night, an' I've dremp three times hand runnin' 'bout muddy watah."

Mom Beck felt a little hand clutch her skirts, and turned to see a frightened little face looking anxiously up at her.

"Now, what's the mattah with you, honey?" she asked. "I'm only a-tellin' Mistah Fostah about some silly old signs my mammy used to believe in. But they don't mean nothin' at all."

Lloyd couldn't have told why she was

unhappy. She had not understood all that Mom Beck had said, but her sensitive little mind was shadowed by a foreboding of trouble.

The shadow deepened as the days passed. Papa Jack got worse instead of better. There were times when he did not recognize any one, and talked wildly of things that had happened out at the mines.

All the long, beautiful October went by, and still he lay in the darkened room. Lloyd wandered listlessly from place to place, trying to keep out of the way, and to make as little trouble as possible.

"I'm a real little woman now," she repeated, proudly, whenever she was allowed to pound ice or carry fresh water. "I'm papa's little comfort."

One cold, frosty evening she was standing in the hall, when the doctor

came out of the room and began to put on his overcoat.

Her mother followed him to take his directions for the night.

He was an old friend of the family's. Elizabeth had climbed on his knees many a time when she was a child. She loved this faithful, white-haired old doctor almost as dearly as she had her father.

"My daughter," he said, kindly, laying his hand on her shoulder, "you are wearing yourself out, and will be down yourself if you are not careful. You must have a professional nurse. No telling how long this is going to last. As soon as Jack is able to travel you must have a change of climate."

Her lips trembled. "We can't afford it, doctor," she said. "Jack has been too sick from the very first to talk about

business. He always said a woman should not be worried with such matters, anyway. I don't know what arrangements he has made out West. For all I know, the little I have in my purse now may be all that stands between us and the poorhouse."

The doctor drew on his gloves.

"Why don't you tell your father how matters are?" he asked.

Then he saw he had ventured a step too far.

"I believe Jack would rather die than take help from his hands," she answered, drawing herself up proudly. Her eyes flashed. "I would, too, as far as I am concerned myself."

Then a tender look came over her pale, tired face, as she added, gently, "But I'd do anything on earth to help Jack get well."

The doctor cleared his throat vigor-

ously, and bolted out with a gruff good night. As he rode past Locust, he took solid satisfaction in shaking his fist at the light in an upper window.

CHAPTER VI.

HE Little Colonel followed her mother to the dining-room, but paused on the threshold as she saw her throw herself into Mom Beck's arms and burst out crying.

"Oh, Becky!" she sobbed, "what is going to become of us? The doctor says we must have a professional nurse, and we must go away from here soon. There are only a few dollars left in my purse, and I don't know what we'll do when they are gone. I just know Jack is going to die, and then I'll die, too, and then what will become of the baby?"

Mom Beck sat down, and took the trembling form in her arms.

"There, there!" she said, soothingly, "have yo' cry out. It will do you good. Poah chile! all wo'n out with watchin' an' worry. Ne'm min', ole Becky is as good as a dozen nuhses yet. I'll get Judy to come up an' look aftah the kitchen. An' nobody ain' gwine to die, honey. Don't you go to slayin' all you's got befo' you's called on to do it. The good Lawd is goin' to pahvide fo' us same as Abraham."

The last Sabbath's sermon was still fresh in her mind.

"If we only hold out faithful, there's boun' to be a ram caught by the hawns some place, even if we haven't got eyes to see through the thickets. The Lawd will pahvide whethah it's a burnt offerin' or a meal's vittles. He sho'ly will."

Lloyd crept away frightened. It seemed such an awful thing to see her mother cry.

All at once her bright, happy world had changed to such a strange, uncertain place. She felt as if all sorts of terrible things were about to happen.

She went into the parlour, and crawled into a dark corner under the piano, feeling that there was no place to go for comfort, since the one who had always kissed away her little troubles was so heart-broken herself.

There was a patter of soft feet across the carpet, and Fritz poked his sympathetic nose into her face. She put her arms around him, and laid her head against his curly back with a desolate sob.

It is pitiful to think how much imaginative children suffer through their wrong conception of things.

She had seen the little roll of bills in her mother's pocketbook. She had seen how much smaller it grew every time it was taken out to pay for the expensive wines and medicines that had to be bought so often. She had heard her mother tell the doctor that was all that stood between them and the poor-house.

There was no word known to the Little Colonel that brought such thoughts of horror as the word poor-house.

Her most vivid recollection of her life in New York was something that happened a few weeks before they left there. One day in the park she ran away from the maid, who, instead of Mom Beck, had taken charge of her that afternoon.

When the angry woman found her, she frightened her almost into a spasm

by telling her what always happened to naughty children who ran away.

"They take all their pretty clothes off," she said, "and dress them up in old things made of bed-ticking. Then they take 'm to the poorhouse, where nobody but beggars live. They don't have anything to eat but cabbage and corn-dodger, and they have to eat that out of tin pans. And they just have a pile of straw to sleep in."

On their way home she had pointed out to the frightened child a poor woman who was grubbing in an ash-barrel.

"That's the way people get to look who live in poorhouses," she said.

It was this memory that was troubling the Little Colonel now.

"Oh, Fritz!" she whispered, with the tears running down her cheeks, "I can't beah to think of my pretty mothah goin'

there. That woman's eyes were all red, an' her hair was jus' awful. She was so bony an' stahved-lookin'. It would jus' kill poah Papa Jack to lie on straw an' eat out of a tin pan. I know it would!"

When Mom Beck opened the door, hunting her, the room was so dark that she would have gone away if the dog had not come running out from under the piano.

"You heah, too, chile?" she asked, in surprise. "I have to go down now an' see if I can get Judy to come help to-morrow. Do you think you can undress yo'self to-night?"

"Of co'se," answered the Little Colonel. Mom Beck was in such a hurry to be off that she did not notice the tremble in the voice that answered her.

"Well, the can'le is lit in yo' room. So run along now like a nice little lady,

an' don't bothah yo' mamma. She got her hands full already."

"All right," answered the child.

A quarter of an hour later she stood in her little white nightgown with her hand on the door-knob.

She opened the door just a crack and peeped in. Her mother laid her finger on her lips, and beckoned silently. In another instant Lloyd was in her lap. She had cried herself quiet in the dark corner under the piano; but there was something more pathetic in her eyes than tears. It was the expression of one who understood and sympathized.

"Oh, mothah," she whispered, "we does have such lots of troubles."

"Yes, chickabiddy, but I hope they will soon be over now," was the answer, as the anxious face tried to smile bravely for the child's sake. "Papa is

sleeping so nicely now he is sure to be better in the morning."

That comforted the Little Colonel some, but for days she was haunted by the fear of the poorhouse.

Every time her mother paid out any money she looked anxiously to see how much was still left. She wandered about the place, touching the trees and vines with caressing hands, feeling that she might soon have to leave them.

She loved them all so dearly, — every stick and stone, and even the stubby old snowball bushes that never bloomed.

Her dresses were outgrown and faded, but no one had any time or thought to spend on getting her new ones. A little hole began to come in the toe of each shoe.

She was still wearing her summer

sunbonnet, although the days were getting frosty.

She was a proud little thing. It mortified her for any one to see her looking so shabby. Still she uttered no word of complaint, for fear of lessening the little amount in the pocketbook that her mother had said stood between them and the poorhouse.

She sat with her feet tucked under her when any one called.

"I wouldn't mind bein' a little beggah so much myself," she thought, "but I jus' can't have my bu'ful sweet mothah lookin' like that awful red-eyed woman."

One day the doctor called Mrs. Sherman out into the hall. "I have just come from your father's," he said. "He is suffering from a severe attack of rheumatism. He is confined to his room, and is positively starving for

company. He told me he would give anything in the world to have his little grandchild with him. There were tears in his eyes when he said it, and that means a good deal from him. He fairly idolizes her. The servants have told him she mopes around and is getting thin and pale. He is afraid she will come down with the fever, too. He told me to use any stratagem I liked to get her there. But I think it's better to tell you frankly how matters stand. It will do the child good to have a change, Elizabeth, and I solemnly think you ought to let her go, for a week at least."

"But, doctor, she has never been away from me a single night in her life. She'd die of homesickness, and I know she'll never consent to leave me. Then suppose Jack should get worse —"

"We'll suppose nothing of the kind," he interrupted, brusquely. "Tell Becky

to pack up her things. Leave Lloyd to me. I'll get her consent without any trouble."

"Come, Colonel," he called, as he left the house. "I'm going to take you a little ride."

No one ever knew what the kind old fellow said to her to induce her to go to her grandfather's.

She came back from her ride looking brighter than she had in a long time. She felt that in some way, although in what way she could not understand, her going would help them to escape the dreaded poorhouse.

"Don't send Mom Beck with me," she pleaded, when the time came to start. "You come with me, mothah."

Mrs. Sherman had not been past the gate for weeks, but she could not refuse the coaxing hands that clung to hers.

It was a dull, dreary day. There was

a chilling hint of snow in the damp air. The leaves whirled past them with a mournful rustling.

Mrs. Sherman turned up the collar of Lloyd's cloak.

"You must have a new one soon," she said, with a sigh. "Maybe one of mine could be made over for you. And those poor little shoes! I must think to send to town for a new pair."

The walk was over so soon. The Little Colonel's heart beat fast as they came in sight of the gate. She winked bravely to keep back the tears; for she had promised the doctor not to let her mother see her cry.

A week seemed such a long time to look forward to.

She clung to her mother's neck, feeling that she could never give her up so long.

"Tell me good-bye, baby dear," said

Mrs. Sherman, feeling that she could not trust herself to stay much longer. "It is too cold for you to stand here. Run on, and I'll watch you till you get inside the door."

The Little Colonel started bravely down the avenue, with Fritz at her heels. Every few steps she turned to look back and kiss her hand.

Mrs. Sherman watched her through a blur of tears. It had been nearly seven years since she had last stood at that old gate. Such a crowd of memories came rushing up!

She looked again. There was a flutter of a white handkerchief as the Little Colonel and Fritz went up the steps. Then the great front door closed behind them.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT early twilight hour just before the lamps were lit was the lonesomest one the Little Colonel had ever spent. Her grandfather was asleep up-stairs. There was a cheery wood fire crackling on the hearth of the big fireplace in the hall, but the great house was so still. The corners were full of shadows.

She opened the front door with a wild longing to run away.

"Come, Fritz," she said, closing the door softly behind her, "let's go down to the gate."

The air was cold. She shivered as

they raced along under the bare branches of the locusts. She leaned against the gate, peering out through the bars. The road stretched white through the gathering darkness in the direction of the little cottage.

"Oh, I want to go home so bad!" she sobbed. "I want to see my mothah."

She laid her hand irresolutely on the latch, pushed the gate ajar, and then hesitated.

"No, I promised the doctah I'd stay," she thought. "He said I could help mothah and Papa Jack, both of 'em, by stayin' heah, an' I'll do it."

Fritz, who had pushed himself through the partly opened gate to rustle around among the dead leaves outside, came bounding back with something in his mouth.

"Heah, suh!" she called. "Give it to me!" He dropped a small gray kid

glove in her outstretched hand. "Oh, it's mothah's!" she cried. "I reckon she dropped it when she was tellin' me good-bye. Oh, you deah old dog fo' findin' it."

She laid the glove against her cheek as fondly as if it had been her mother's soft hand. There was something wonderfully comforting in the touch.

As they walked slowly back toward the house she rolled it up and put it lovingly away in her tiny apron pocket.

All that week it was a talisman whose touch helped the homesick little soul to be brave and womanly.

When Maria, the coloured housekeeper, went into the hall to light the lamps, the Little Colonel was sitting on the big fur rug in front of the fire, talking contentedly to Fritz, who lay with his curly head in her lap.

"You all's goin' to have tea in the

Cun'l's room to-night," said Maria. "He tole me to tote it up soon as he rung the bell."

"There it goes now," cried the child, jumping up from the rug.

She followed Maria up the wide stairs. The Colonel was sitting in a large easy chair, wrapped in a gaily flowered dressing-gown, that made his hair look unusually white by contrast.

His dark eyes were intently watching the door. As it opened to let the Little Colonel pass through, a very tender smile lighted up his stern face.

"So you did come to see grandpa after all," he cried, triumphantly. "Come here and give me a kiss. Seems to me you've been staying away a mighty long time."

As she stood beside him with his arm around her, Walker came in with a tray full of dishes.

"We're going to have a regular little tea-party," said the Colonel.

Lloyd watched with sparkling eyes as Walker set out the rare old-fashioned dishes. There was a fat little silver sugar-bowl with a butterfly perched on each side to form the handles, and there was a slim, graceful cream-pitcher shaped like a lily.

"They belonged to your great-great-grandmother," said the Colonel, "and they're going to be yours some day if you grow up and have a house of your own."

The expression on her beaming face was worth a fortune to the Colonel.

When Walker pushed her chair up to the table, she turned to her grandfather with shining eyes.

"Oh, it's just like a pink story," she cried, clapping her hands. "The shades on the can'les, the icin' on the cake, an'

the posies in the bowl, — why, even the jelly is that colah, too. Oh, my darlin' little teacup! It's jus' like a pink rosebud. I'm so glad I came!"

The Colonel smiled at the success of his plan. In the depths of his satisfaction he even had a plate of quail and toast set down on the hearth for Fritz.

"This is the nicest pahty I evah was at," remarked the Little Colonel, as Walker helped her to jam the third time.

Her grandfather chuckled.

"Blackberry jam always makes me think of Tom," he said. "Did you ever hear what your Uncle Tom did when he was a little fellow in dresses?"

She shook her head gravely.

"Well, the children were all playing hide-and-seek one day. They hunted high and they hunted low after everybody else had been caught, but they

couldn't find Tom. At last they began to call, 'Home free! You can come home free!' but he did not come. When he had been hidden so long they were frightened about him, they went to their mother and told her he wasn't to be found anywhere. She looked down the well and behind the fire-boards in the fireplaces. They called and called till they were out of breath. Finally she thought of looking in the big dark pantry where she kept her fruit. There stood Mister Tom. He had opened a jar of blackberry jam, and was just going for it with both hands. The jam was all over his face and hair and little gingham apron, and even up his wrists. He was the funniest sight I ever saw."

The Little Colonel laughed heartily at his description, and begged for more stories. Before he knew it he was back

in the past with his little Tom and Elizabeth.

Nothing could have entertained the child more than these scenes he recalled of her mother's childhood.

"All her old playthings are up in the garret," he said, as they rose from the table. "I'll have them brought down to-morrow. There's a doll I brought her from New Orleans once when she was about your size. No telling what it looks like now, but it was a beauty when it was new."

Lloyd clapped her hands and spun around the room like a top.

"Oh, I'm so glad I came!" she exclaimed for the third time. "What did she call the doll, gran'fathah, do you remembah?"

"I never paid much attention to such things," he answered, "but I do remember the name of this one, because

she named it for her mother, — Amanthis."

"Amanthis," repeated the child, dreamily, as she leaned against his knee. "I think that is a lovely name, gran'fathah. I wish they had called me that." She repeated it softly several times. "It sounds like the wind a-blowin' through white clovah, doesn't it?"

"It is a beautiful name to me, my child," answered the old man, laying his hand tenderly on her soft hair, "but not so beautiful as the woman who bore it. She was the fairest flower of all Kentucky. There never was another lived as sweet and gentle as your Grandmother Amanthis."

He stroked her hair absently, and gazed into the fire. He scarcely noticed when she slipped away from him.

She buried her face a moment in the

bowl of pink roses. Then she went to the window and drew back the curtain. Leaning her head against the window-sill, she began stringing on the thread of a tune the things that just then thrilled her with a sense of their beauty.

"Oh, the locus'-trees a-blowin'," she sang, softly. "An' the moon a-shinin' through them. An' the starlight an' pink roses; an' Amanthis — an' Amanthis!"

She hummed it over and over until Walker had finished carrying the dishes away.

It was a strange thing that the Colonel's unfrequent moods of tenderness were like those warm days that they call weather-breeders.

They were sure to be followed by a change of atmosphere. This time as the fierce rheumatic pain came back he stormed at Walker, and scolded him for

everything he did and everything he left undone.

When Maria came up to put Lloyd to bed, Fritz was tearing around the room barking at his shadow.

"Put that dog out, M'ria!" roared the Colonel, almost crazy with its antics. "Take it down-stairs, and put it out of the house, I say! Nobody but a heathen would let a dog sleep in the house, anyway."

The homesick feeling began to creep over Lloyd again. She had expected to keep Fritz in her room at night for company. But for the touch of the little glove in her pocket, she would have said something ugly to her grandfather when he spoke so harshly.

His own ill humour was reflected in her scowl as she followed Maria down the stairs to drive Fritz out into the dark.

They stood a moment in the open door, after Maria had slapped him with her apron to make him go off the porch.

"Oh, look at the new moon!" cried Lloyd, pointing to the slender crescent in the autumn sky.

"I'se feared to, honey," answered Maria, "less I should see it through the trees. That 'ud bring me bad luck for a month, suah. I'll go out on the lawn where it's open, an' look at it ovah my right shouldah."

While they were walking backward down the path, intent on reaching a place where they could have an uninterrupted view of the moon, Fritz sneaked around to the other end of the porch.

No one was watching. He slipped into the house as noiselessly as his four soft feet could carry him.

Maria, going through the dark upper

hall, with a candle held high above her head and Lloyd clinging to her skirts, did not see a tasselled tail swinging along in front of her. It disappeared under the big bed when she led Lloyd into the room next the old Colonel's.

The child felt very sober while she was being put to bed.

The furniture was heavy and dark. An ugly portrait of a cross old man in a wig frowned at her from over the mantel. The dancing firelight made his eyes frightfully lifelike.

The bed was so high she had to climb on a chair to get in. She heard Maria's heavy feet go shuffling down the stairs. A door banged. Then it was so still she could hear the clock tick in the next room.

It was the first time in all her life that her mother had not come to kiss her good night.

Her lips quivered, and a big tear rolled down on the pillow.

She reached out to the chair beside her bed, where her clothes were hanging, and felt in her apron pocket for the little glove. She sat up in bed, and looked at it in the dim firelight. Then she held it against her face. "Oh, I want my mothah! I want my mothah!" she sobbed, in a heart-broken whisper.

Laying her head on her knees, she began to cry quietly, but with great sobs that nearly choked her.

There was a rustling under the bed. She lifted her wet face in alarm. Then she smiled through her tears, for there was Fritz, her own dear dog, and not an unknown horror waiting to grab her.

He stood on his hind legs, eagerly trying to lap away her tears with his friendly red tongue.

She clasped him in her arms with an

ecstatic hug. "Oh, you're such a comfort!" she whispered. "I can go to sleep now."

She spread her apron on the bed, and motioned him to jump. With one spring he was beside her.

It was nearly midnight when the door from the Colonel's room was noiselessly opened.

The old man stirred the fire gently until it burst into a bright flame. Then he turned to the bed. "You rascal!" he whispered, looking at Fritz, who raised his head quickly with a threatening look in his wicked eyes.

Lloyd lay with one hand stretched out, holding the dog's protecting paw. The other held something against her tear-stained cheek.

"What under the sun!" he thought, as he drew it gently from her fingers. The little glove lay across his hand,

slim and aristocratic-looking. He knew instinctively whose it was. "Poor little thing's been crying," he thought. "She wants Elizabeth. And so do I! And so do I!" his heart cried out with bitter longing. "It's never been like home since she left."

He laid the glove back on her pillow, and went to his room.

"If Jack Sherman should die," he said to himself many times that night, "then she would come home again. Oh, little daughter, little daughter! why did you ever leave me?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE first thing that greeted the Little Colonel's eyes when she opened them next morning was her mother's old doll. Maria had laid it on the pillow beside her.

It was beautifully dressed, although in a queer, old-fashioned style that seemed very strange to the child.

She took it up with careful fingers, remembering its great age. Maria had warned her not to waken her grandfather, so she admired it in whispers.

"Jus' think, Fritz," she exclaimed, "this doll has seen my Gran'mothah Amanthis, an' it's named for her. My

"She took it up with careful fingers"

mothah wasn't any bigger'n me when she played with it. I think it is the loveliest doll I evah saw in my whole life."

Fritz gave a jealous bark.

"Sh!" commanded his little mistress. "Didn't you heah M'ria say, 'Fo' de Lawd's sake don't wake up ole Marse?' Why don't you mind?"

The Colonel was not in the best of humours after such a wakeful night, but the sight of her happiness made him smile in spite of himself, when she danced into his room with the doll.

She had eaten an early breakfast and gone back up-stairs to examine the other toys that were spread out in her room.

The door between the two rooms was ajar. All the time he was dressing and taking his coffee he could hear her talking to some one. He supposed it was Maria. But as he glanced over his mail

he heard the Little Colonel saying, "May Lilly, do you know about Billy Goat Gruff? Do you want me to tell you that story?"

He leaned forward until he could look through the narrow opening of the door. Two heads were all he could see, — Lloyd's, soft-haired and golden, May Lilly's, covered with dozens of tightly braided little black tails.

He was about to order May Lilly back to the cabin, when he remembered the scene that followed the last time he had done so. He concluded to keep quiet and listen.

"Billy Goat Gruff was so fat," the story went on, "jus' as fat as gran'-fathah."

The Colonel glanced up with an amused smile at the fine figure reflected in an opposite mirror.

"Trip-trap, trip-trap, went Billy Goat

Gruff's little feet ovah the bridge to the giant's house."

Just at this point Walker, who was putting things in order, closed the door between the rooms.

"Open that door, you black rascal!" called the Colonel, furious at the interruption.

In his haste to obey, Walker knocked over a pitcher of water that had been left on the floor beside the wash-stand.

Then the Colonel yelled at him to be quick about mopping it up, so that by the time the door was finally opened, Lloyd was finishing her story.

The Colonel looked in just in time to see her put her hands to her temples, with her forefingers protruding from her forehead like horns. She said in a deep voice, as she brandished them at May Lilly, "With my two long speahs I'll poke yo' eyeballs through yo' yeahs."

The little darky fell back giggling. " That sut'n'y was like a billy-goat. We had one once that 'ud make a body step around mighty peart. It slip up behine me one mawnin' on the poach, an' fo' awhile I thought my haid was buss open suah. I got up toreckly, though, an' I cotch him, and when I done got through, Mistah Billy-goat feel po'ly moah'n a week. He sut'n'y did."

Walker grinned, for he had witnessed the scene.

Just then Maria put her head in at the door to say, " May Lilly, yo' mammy's callin' you."

Lloyd and Fritz followed her noisily down-stairs. Then for nearly an hour it was very quiet in the great house.

The Colonel, looking out of the window, could see Lloyd playing hide-and-seek with Fritz under the bare locust-trees.

When she came in her cheeks were glowing from her run in the frosty air. Her eyes shone like stars, and her face was radiant.

"See what I've found down in the dead leaves," she cried. "A little blue violet, bloomin' all by itself."

She brought a tiny cup from the next room, that belonged to the set of doll dishes, and put the violet in it.

"There!" she said, setting it on the table at her grandfather's elbow. "Now I'll put Amanthis in this chair, where you can look at her, an' you won't get lonesome while I'm playing outdoors."

He drew her toward him and kissed her.

"Why, how cold your hands are!" he exclaimed. "Staying in this warm room all the time makes me forget it is so wintry outdoors. I don't believe you are dressed warmly enough. You ought

not to wear sunbonnets this time of year."

Then for the first time he noticed her outgrown cloak and shabby shoes.

"What are you wearing these old clothes for?" he said, impatiently. "Why didn't they dress you up when you were going visiting? It isn't showing proper respect to send you off in the oldest things you've got."

It was a sore point with the Little Colonel. It hurt her pride enough to have to wear old clothes without being scolded for it. Besides, she felt that in some way her mother was being blamed for what could not be helped.

"They's the best I've got," she answered, proudly choking back the tears. "I don't need any new ones, 'cause maybe we'll be goin' away pretty soon."

"Going away!" he echoed, blankly. "Where?"

She did not answer until he repeated the question. Then she turned her back on him, and started toward the door. The tears she was too proud to let him see were running down her face.

"We's goin' to the poah-house," she exclaimed, defiantly, "jus' as soon as the money in the pocketbook is used up. It was nearly gone when I came away."

Here she began to sob, as she fumbled at the door she could not see to open.

"I'm goin' home to my mothah right now. She loves me if my clothes are old and ugly."

"Why, Lloyd," called the Colonel, amazed and distressed by her sudden burst of grief. "Come here to grandpa. Why didn't you tell me so before?"

The face, the tone, the outstretched arm, all drew her irresistibly to him. It was a relief to lay her head on his shoulder, and unburden herself of the

fear that had haunted her so many days.

With her arms around his neck, and the precious little head held close to his heart, the old Colonel was in such a softened mood that he would have promised anything to comfort her.

"There, there," he said, soothingly, stroking her hair with a gentle hand, when she had told him all her troubles. "Don't you worry about that, my dear. Nobody is going to eat out of tin pans and sleep on straw. Grandpa just won't let them."

She sat up and wiped her eyes on her apron. "But Papa Jack would die befo' he'd take help from you," she wailed. "An' so would mothah. I heard her tell the doctah so."

The tender expression on the Colonel's face changed to one like flint, but he kept on stroking her hair.

"People sometimes change their minds," he said, grimly. "I wouldn't worry over a little thing like that if I were you. Don't you want to run downstairs and tell M'ria to give you a piece of cake?"

"Oh, yes," she exclaimed, smiling up at him. "I'll bring you some, too."

When the first train went into Louisville that afternoon, Walker was on board with an order in his pocket to one of the largest dry goods establishments in the city. When he came out again that evening, he carried a large box into the Colonel's room.

Lloyd's eyes shone as she looked into it. There was an elegant fur-trimmed cloak, a pair of dainty shoes, and a muff that she caught up with a shriek of delight.

"What kind of a thing is this?" grumbled the Colonel, as he took out a

hat that had been carefully packed in one corner of the box. "I told them to send the most stylish thing they had. It looks like a scarecrow," he continued, as he set it askew on the child's head.

She snatched it off to look at it herself. "Oh, it's jus' like Emma Louise Wyfo'd's!" she exclaimed. "You didn't put it on straight. See! This is the way it goes."

She climbed up in front of the mirror, and put it on as she had seen Emma Louise wear hers.

"Well, it's a regular Napoleon hat," exclaimed the Colonel, much pleased. "So little girls nowadays have taken to wearing soldier's caps, have they? It's right becoming to you with your short hair. Grandpa is real proud of his 'little Colonel.'"

She gave him the military salute he had taught her, and then ran to throw

her arms around him. "Oh, gran'-fathah!" she exclaimed, between her kisses, "you'se jus' as good as Santa Claus, every bit."

The Colonel's rheumatism was better next day; so much better that toward evening he walked down-stairs into the long drawing-room. The room had not been illuminated in years as it was that night.

Every wax taper was lighted in the silver candelabra, and the dim old mirrors multiplied their lights on every side. A great wood fire threw a cheerful glow over the portraits and the frescoed ceiling. All the linen covers had been taken from the furniture.

Lloyd, who had never seen this room except with the chairs shrouded and the blinds down, came running in presently. She was bewildered at first by the change. Then she began walking softly

around the room, examining everything.

In one corner stood a tall, gilded harp that her grandmother had played in her girlhood. The heavy cover had kept it fair and untarnished through all the years it had stood unused. To the child's beauty-loving eyes it seemed the loveliest thing she had ever seen.

She stood with her hands clasped behind her as her gaze wandered from its pedals to the graceful curves of its tall frame. It shone like burnished gold in the soft firelight.

"Oh, gran'fathah!" she asked at last in a low, reverent tone, "where did you get it? Did an angel leave it heah fo' you?"

He did not answer for a moment. Then he said, huskily, as he looked up at a portrait over the mantel, "Yes, my darling, an angel did leave it here. She

always was one. Come here to grandpa."

He took her on his knee, and pointed up to the portrait. The same harp was in the picture. Standing beside it, with one hand resting on its shining strings, was a young girl all in white.

"That's the way she looked the first time I ever saw her," said the Colonel, dreamily. "A June rose in her hair, and another at her throat; and her soul looked right out through those great, dark eyes — the purest, sweetest soul God ever made! My beautiful Amanthis!"

"My bu'ful Amanthis!" repeated the child, in an awed whisper.

She sat gazing into the lovely young face for a long time, while the old man seemed lost in dreams.

"Gran'fathah," she said at length, patting his cheek to attract his atten-

tion, and then nodding toward the portrait, " did she love my mothah like my mothah loves me? "

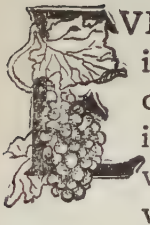
" Certainly, my dear," was the gentle reply.

It was the twilight hour, when the homesick feeling always came back strongest to Lloyd.

" Then I jus' know that if my bu'ful gran'mothah Amanthis could come down out of that frame, she'd go straight and put her arms around my mothah an' kiss away all her sorry feelin's."

The Colonel fidgeted uncomfortably in his chair a moment. Then to his great relief the tea-bell rang.

CHAPTER IX.



VERY evening after that during Lloyd's visit the fire burned on the hearth of the long drawing-room. All the wax candles were lighted, and the vases were kept full of flowers, fresh from the conservatory.

She loved to steal into the room before her grandfather came down, and carry on imaginary conversations with the old portraits.

Tom's handsome, boyish face had the greatest attraction for her. His eyes looked down so smilingly into hers that she felt he surely understood every word she said to him.

Once Walker overheard her saying, "Uncle Tom, I'm goin' to tell you a story 'bout Billy Goat Gruff."

Peeping into the room, he saw the child looking earnestly up at the picture, with her hands clasped behind her, as she began to repeat her favourite story. "It do beat all," he said to himself, "how one little chile like that can wake up a whole house. She's the life of the place."

The last evening of her visit, as the Colonel was coming down-stairs he heard the faint vibration of a harp-string. It was the first time Lloyd had ever ventured to touch one. He paused on the steps opposite the door, and looked in.

"Heah, Fritz," she was saying, "you get up on the sofa, an' be the company, an' I'll sing fo' you."

Fritz, on the rug before the fire,

opened one sleepy eye and closed it again. She stamped her foot and repeated her order. He paid no attention. Then she picked him up bodily, and, with much puffing and pulling, lifted him into a chair.

He waited until she had gone back to the harp, and then, with one spring, disappeared under the sofa.

"N'm min'," she said, in a disgusted tone. "I'll pay you back, mistah." Then she looked up at the portrait. "Uncle Tom," she said, "you be the company, an' I'll play fo' you."

Her fingers touched the strings so lightly that there was no discord in the random tones. Her voice carried the air clear and true, and the faint trembling of the harp-strings interfered with the harmony no more than if a wandering breeze had been tangled in them as it passed.

"Sing me the songs that to me were so deah
Long, long ago, long ago.
Tell me the tales I delighted to heah
Long, long ago, long ago."

The sweet little voice sang it to the end without missing a word. It was the lullaby her mother oftenest sang to her.

The Colonel, who had sat down on the steps to listen, wiped his eyes.

"My 'long ago' is all that I have left to me," he thought, bitterly, "for to-morrow this little one, who brings back my past with every word and gesture, will leave me, too. Why can't that Jack Sherman die while he's about it, and let me have my own back again?"

That question recurred to him many times during the week after Lloyd's departure. He missed her happy voice at every turn. He missed her bright face at the table. The house seemed so big and desolate without her. He or-

dered all the covers put back on the drawing-room furniture, and the door locked as before.

It was a happy moment for the Little Colonel when she was lifted down from Maggie Boy at the cottage gate.

She went dancing into the house, so glad to find herself in her mother's arms that she forgot all about the new cloak and muff that had made her so proud and happy.

She found her father propped up among the pillows, his fever all gone, and the old mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

He admired her new clothes extravagantly, paying her joking compliments until her face beamed; but when she had danced off to find Mom Beck, he turned to his wife. "Elizabeth," he said, wonderingly, "what do you suppose the old fellow gave her clothes for? I don't like

it. I'm no beggar if I have lost lots of money. After all that's passed between us I don't feel like taking anything from his hands, or letting my child do it, either."

To his great surprise she laid her head down on his pillow beside his and burst into tears.

"Oh, Jack," she sobbed, "I spent the last dollar this morning. I wasn't going to tell you, but I don't know what is to become of us. He gave Lloyd those things because she was just in rags, and I couldn't afford to get anything new."

He looked perplexed. "Why, I brought home so much," he said, in a distressed tone. "I knew I was in for a long siege of sickness, but I was sure there was enough to tide us over that."

She raised her head. "You brought money home!" she replied, in surprise. "I hoped you had, and looked through

all your things, but there was only a little change in one of your pockets. You must have imagined it when you were delirious."

"What!" he cried, sitting bolt upright, and then sinking weakly back among the pillows. "You poor child! You don't mean to tell me you have been skimping along all these weeks on just that check I sent you before starting home?"

"Yes," she sobbed, her face still buried in the pillow. She had borne the strain of continued anxiety so long that she could not stop her tears, now they had once started.

It was with a very thankful heart she watched him take a pack of letters from the coat she brought to his bedside, and draw out a sealed envelope.

"Well, I never once thought of looking among those letters for money," she

exclaimed, as he held it up with a smile.

His investments of the summer before had prospered beyond his greatest hopes, he told her. "Brother Rob is looking after my interests out West, as well as his own," he explained, "and as his father-in-law is the grand mogul of the place, I have the inside track. Then that firm I went security for in New York is nearly on its feet again, and I'll have back every dollar I ever paid out for them. Nobody ever lost anything by those men in the long run. We'll be on top again by this time next year, little wife; so don't borrow any more trouble on that score."

The doctor made his last visit that afternoon. It really seemed as if there would never be any more dark days at the little cottage.

"The clouds have all blown away and

left us their silver linings," said Mrs. Sherman the day her husband was able to go out-of-doors for the first time. He walked down to the post-office, and brought back a letter from the West. It had such encouraging reports of his business that he was impatient to get back to it. He wrote a reply early in the afternoon, and insisted on going to mail it himself.

"I'll never get my strength back," he protested, "unless I have more exercise."

It was a cold, gray November day. A few flakes of snow were falling when he started.

"I'll stop and rest at the Tylers'," he called back, "so don't be uneasy if I'm out some time."

After he left the post-office the fresh air tempted him to go farther than he had intended. At a long distance from

his home his strength seemed suddenly to desert him. The snow began to fall in earnest. Numb with cold, he groped his way back to the house, almost fainting from exhaustion.

Lloyd was blowing soap-bubbles when she saw him come in and fall heavily across the couch. The ghastly pallor of his face and his closed eyes frightened her so that she dropped the little clay pipe she was using. As she stooped to pick up the broken pieces, her mother's cry startled her still more. "Lloyd, run call Becky, quick, quick! Oh, he's dying!"

Lloyd gave one more terrified look and ran to the kitchen, screaming for Mom Beck. No one was there.

The next instant she was running bareheaded as fast as she could go, up the road to Locust. She was confident of finding help there.

The snowflakes clung to her hair and blew against her soft cheeks. All she could see was her mother wringing her hands, and her father's white face. When she burst into the house where the Colonel sat reading by the fire, she was so breathless at first that she could only gasp when she tried to speak.

"Come quick!" she cried. "Papa Jack's a-dyin'! Come stop him!"

At her first impetuous words the Colonel was on his feet. She caught him by the hand and led him to the door before he fully realized what she wanted. Then he drew back. She was impatient at the slightest delay, and only half answered his questions.

"Oh, come, gran'fathah!" she pleaded. "Don't wait to talk!" But he held her until he had learned all the circumstances. He was convinced by what she told him that both Lloyd and her

mother were unduly alarmed. When he found that no one had sent for him, but that the child had come of her own accord, he refused to go.

He did not believe that the man was dying, and he did not intend to step aside one inch from the position he had taken. For seven years he had kept the vow he made when he swore to be a stranger to his daughter. He would keep it for seventy times seven years if need be.

She looked at him perfectly bewildered. She had been so accustomed to his humouring her slightest whims, that it had never occurred to her he would fail to help in a time of such distress.

"Why, gran'fathah," she began, her lips trembling piteously. Then her whole expression changed. Her face grew startlingly white, and her eyes seemed so big and black. The Colonel

looked at her in surprise. He had never seen a child in such a passion before. "I hate you! I hate you!" she exclaimed, all in a tremble. "You's a cruel, wicked man. I'll nevah come heah again, nevah! nevah! nevah!"

The tears rolled down her cheeks as she banged the door behind her and ran down the avenue, her little heart so full of grief and disappointment that she felt she could not possibly bear it.

For more than an hour the Colonel walked up and down the room, unable to shut out the anger and disappointment of that little face.

He knew she was too much like himself ever to retract her words. She would never come back. He never knew until that hour how much he loved her, or how much she had come to mean in his life. She was gone hopelessly beyond recall, unless —

He unlocked the door of the drawing-room and went in. A faint breath of dried rose-leaves greeted him. He walked over to the empty fireplace and looked up at the sweet face of the portrait a long time. Then he leaned his arm on the mantel and bowed his head on it. "Oh, Amanthis," he groaned, "tell me what to do."

Lloyd's own words came back to him. "She'd go right straight an' put her arms around my mothah an' kiss away all the sorry feelin's."

It was a long time he stood there. The battle between his love and pride was a hard one. At last he raised his head and saw that the short winter day was almost over. Without waiting to order his horse he started off in the falling snow toward the cottage.

CHAPTER X.

GOOD many forebodings crowded into the Colonel's mind as he walked hurriedly on. He wondered how he would be received. What if Jack Sherman had died after all? What if Elizabeth should refuse to see him? A dozen times before he reached the gate he pictured to himself the probable scene of their meeting.

He was out of breath and decidedly disturbed in mind when he walked up the path. As he paused on the porch steps, Lloyd came running around the house carrying her parrot on a broom.

Her hair was blowing around her rosy

face under the Napoleon hat she wore, and she was singing.

The last two hours had made a vast change in her feelings. Her father had only fainted from exhaustion.

When she came running back from Locust, she was afraid to go in the house, lest what she dreaded most had happened while she was gone. She opened the door timidly and peeped in. Her father's eyes were open. Then she heard him speak. She ran into the room, and, burying her head in her mother's lap, sobbed out the story of her visit to Locust.

To her great surprise her father began to laugh, and laughed so heartily as she repeated her saucy speech to her grandfather, that it took the worst sting out of her disappointment.

All the time the Colonel had been fighting his pride among the mem-

ories of the dim old drawing-room, Lloyd had been playing with Fritz and Polly.

Now as she came suddenly face to face with her grandfather, she dropped the disgusted bird in the snow, and stood staring at him with startled eyes. If he had fallen out of the sky she could not have been more astonished.

"Where is your mother, child?" he asked, trying to speak calmly. With a backward look, as if she could not believe the evidence of her own sight, she led the way into the hall.

"Mothah! Mothah!" she called, pushing open the parlour door. "Come heah, quick!"

The Colonel, taking the hat from his white head, and dropping it on the floor, took an expectant step forward. There was a slight rustle, and Elizabeth stood

in the doorway. For just a moment they looked into each other's faces. Then the Colonel held out his arm.

"Little daughter," he said, in a tremulous voice. The love of a lifetime seemed to tremble in those two words.

In an instant her arms were around his neck, and he was "kissing away the sorry feelin's" as tenderly as the lost Amanthis could have done.

As soon as Lloyd began to realize what was happening, her face grew radiant. She danced around in such excitement that Fritz barked wildly.

"Come an' see Papa Jack, too," she cried, leading him into the next room.

Whatever deep-rooted prejudices Jack Sherman may have had, they were unselfishly put aside after one look into his wife's happy face.

He raised himself on his elbow as the

dignified old soldier crossed the room. The white hair, the empty sleeve, the remembrance of all the old man had lost, and the thought that after all he was Elizabeth's father, sent a very tender feeling through the younger man's heart.

"Will you take my hand, sir?" he asked, sitting up and offering it in his straightforward way.

"Of co'se he will!" exclaimed Lloyd, who still clung to her grandfather's arm. "Of co'se he will!"

"I have been too near death to harbour ill will any longer," said the younger man, as their hands met in a strong, forgiving clasp.

The old Colonel smiled grimly.

"I had thought that even death itself could not make me give in," he said, "but I've had to make a complete surrender to the Little Colonel."

That Christmas there was such a celebration at Locust that May Lilly and Henry Clay nearly went wild in the general excitement of the preparation. Walker hung up cedar and holly and mistletoe till the big house looked like a bower. Maria bustled about, airing rooms and bringing out stores of linen and silver.

The Colonel himself filled the great punch-bowl that his grandfather had brought from Virginia.

"I'm glad we're goin' to stay heah to-night," said Lloyd, as she hung up her stocking Christmas Eve. "It will be so much easiah fo' Santa Claus to get down these big chimneys."

In the morning when she found four tiny stockings hanging beside her own, overflowing with candy for Fritz, her happiness was complete.

That night there was a tree in the

drawing-room that reached to the frescoed ceiling. When May Lilly came in to admire it and get her share from its loaded branches, Lloyd came skipping up to her. "Oh, I'm goin' to live heah all wintah," she cried. "Mom Beck's goin' to stay heah with me, too, while mothah an' Papa Jack go down South where the alligatahs live. Then when they get well an' come back, Papa Jack is goin' to build a house on the othah side of the lawn. I'm to live in both places at once; mothah said so."

There were music and light, laughing voices and happy hearts in the old home that night. It seemed as if the old place had awakened from a long dream and found itself young again.

The plan the Little Colonel unfolded to May Lilly was carried out in every detail. It seemed a long winter to the child, but it was a happy one. There

were not so many displays of temper now that she was growing older, but the letters that went southward every week were full of her odd speeches and mischievous pranks. The old Colonel found it hard to refuse her anything. If it had not been for Mom Beck's decided ways, the child would have been sadly spoiled.

At last the spring came again. The pewees sang in the cedars. The dandelions sprinkled the roadsides like stars. The locust-trees tossed up the white spray of their fragrant blossoms with every wave of their green boughs.

"They'll soon be heah! They'll soon be heah!" chanted the Little Colonel every day.

The morning they came she had been down the avenue a dozen times to look for them before the carriage had even started to meet them.

"Walkah," she called, "cut me a big locus' bough. I want to wave it fo' a flag!"

Just as he dropped a branch down at her feet, she caught the sound of wheels. "Hurry, gran'fathah," she called; "they's comin'." But the old Colonel had already started on toward the gate to meet them. The carriage stopped, and in a moment more Papa Jack was tossing Lloyd up in his arms, while the old Colonel was helping Elizabeth to alight.

"Isn't this a happy mawnin'?" exclaimed the Little Colonel, as she leaned from her seat on her father's shoulder to kiss his sunburned cheek.

"A very happy morning," echoed her grandfather, as he walked on toward the house with Elizabeth's hand clasped close in his own.

Long after they had passed up the

steps the old locusts kept echoing the Little Colonel's words. Years ago they had showered their fragrant blossoms in this same path to make a sweet white way for Amanthis's little feet to tread when the Colonel brought home his bride.

They had dropped their tribute on the coffin-lid when Tom was carried home under their drooping branches. The soldier-boy had loved them so, that a little cluster had been laid on the breast of the gray coat he wore.

Night and day they had guarded this old home like silent sentinels that loved it well.

Now, as they looked down on the united family, a thrill passed through them to their remotest bloom-tipped branches.

It sounded only like a faint rustling of leaves, but it was the locusts whisper-

ing together. "The children have come home at last," they kept repeating. "What a happy morning! Oh, what a happy morning!"

The Giant Scissors

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The Giant Scissors

CHAPTER I

IN THE PEAR-TREE

JOYCE was crying, up in old Monsieur Gréville's tallest pear-tree. She had gone down to the farthest corner of the garden, out of sight of the house, for she did not want any one to know that she was miserable enough to cry.

She was tired of the garden with the high stone wall around it, that made her feel like a prisoner; she was tired of

French verbs and foreign faces; she was tired of France, and so homesick for her mother and Jack and Holland and the baby, that she couldn't help crying. No wonder, for she was only twelve years old, and she had never been out of the little Western village where she was born, until the day she started abroad with her Cousin Kate.

Now she sat perched up on a limb in a dismal bunch, her chin in her hands and her elbows on her knees. It was a gray afternoon in November; the air was frosty, although the laurel-bushes in the garden were all in bloom.

"I s'pect there is snow on the ground at home," thought Joyce, "and there's a big, cheerful fire in the sitting-room grate.

"Holland and the baby are shelling corn, and Mary is popping it. Dear me! I can smell it just as plain! Jack will be

coming in from the post-office pretty soon, and maybe he'll have one of my letters. Mother will read it out loud, and there they'll all be, thinking that I am having such a fine time; that it is such a grand thing for me to be abroad studying, and having dinner served at night in so many courses, and all that sort of thing. They don't know that I am sitting up here in this pear-tree, lonesome enough to die. Oh, if I could only go back home and see them for even five minutes," she sobbed, "but I can't! I can't! There's a whole wide ocean between us!"

She shut her eyes, and leaned back against the tree as that desolate feeling of homesickness settled over her like a great miserable ache. Then she found that shutting her eyes, and thinking very hard about the little brown house at home, seemed to bring it into plain sight.

It was like opening a book, and seeing picture after picture as she turned the pages.

There they were in the kitchen, washing dishes, she and Mary; and Mary was standing on a soap-box to make her tall enough to handle the dishes easily. How her funny little braid of yellow hair bobbed up and down as she worked, and how her dear little freckled face beamed, as they told stories to each other to make the work seem easier.

Mary's stories all began the same way: "If I had a witch with a wand, this is what we would do." The witch with a wand had come to Joyce in the shape of Cousin Kate Ware, and that coming was one of the pictures that Joyce could see now, as she thought about it with her eyes closed.

There was Holland swinging on the gate, waiting for her to come home from

school, and trying to tell her by excited gestures, long before she was within speaking distance, that some one was in the parlour. The baby had on his best plaid kilt and new tie, and the tired little mother was sitting talking in the parlour, an unusual thing for her. Joyce could see herself going up the path, swinging her sunbonnet by the strings and taking hurried little bites of a big June apple in order to finish it before going into the house. Now she was sitting on the sofa beside Cousin Kate, feeling very awkward and shy with her little brown fingers clasped in this stranger's soft white hand.

She had heard that Cousin Kate was a very rich old maid, who had spent years abroad, studying music and languages, and she had expected to see a stout, homely woman with bushy eyebrows, like Miss Teckla Schaum, who

played the church organ, and taught German in the High School.

But Cousin Kate was altogether unlike Miss Teckla. She was tall and slender, she was young-looking and pretty, and there was a stylish air about her, from the waves of her soft golden brown hair to the bottom of her tailor-made gown, that was not often seen in this little Western village.

Joyce saw herself glancing admiringly at Cousin Kate, and then pulling down her dress as far as possible, painfully conscious that her shoes were untied, and white with dust. The next picture was several days later. She and Jack were playing mumble-peg outside under the window by the lilac-bushes, and the little mother was just inside the door, bending over a pile of photographs that Cousin Kate had dropped in her lap. Cousin Kate was saying, "This beautiful old

French villa is where I expect to spend the winter, Aunt Emily. These are views of Tours, the town that lies across the river Loire from it, and these are some of the châteaux near by that I intend to visit. They say the purest French in the world is spoken there. I have prevailed on one of the dearest old ladies that ever lived to give me rooms with her. She and her husband live all alone in this big country place, so I shall have to provide against loneliness by taking my company with me. Will you let me have Joyce for a year?"

Jack and she stopped playing in sheer astonishment, while Cousin Kate went on to explain how many advantages she could give the little girl to whom she had taken such a strong fancy.

Looking through the lilac-bushes, Joyce could see her mother wipe her eyes and say, "It seems like pure providence,

Kate, and I can't stand in the child's way. She'll have to support herself soon, and ought to be prepared for it; but she's the oldest of the five, you know, and she has been like my right hand ever since her father died. There'll not be a minute while she is gone that I shall not miss her and wish her back. She's the life and sunshine of the whole home."

Then Joyce could see the little brown house turned all topsyturvy in the whirl of preparation that followed, and the next thing, she was standing on the platform at the station, with her new steamer trunk beside her. Half the town was there to bid her good-bye. In the excitement of finding herself a person of such importance she forgot how much she was leaving behind her, until looking up, she saw a tender, wistful smile on her mother's face, sadder than any tears.

Luckily the locomotive whistled just

then, and the novelty of getting aboard a train for the first time, helped her to be brave at the parting. She stood on the rear platform of the last car, waving her handkerchief to the group at the station as long as it was in sight, so that the last glimpse her mother should have of her, was with her bright little face all ashine.

All these pictures passed so rapidly through Joyce's mind, that she had retraced the experiences of the last three months in as many minutes. Then, somehow, she felt better. The tears had washed away the ache in her throat. She wiped her eyes and climbed like a squirrel to the highest limb that could bear her weight.

This was not the first time that the old pear-tree had been shaken by Joyce's grief, and it knew that her spells of homesickness always ended in this way. There

she sat, swinging her plump legs back and forth, her long light hair blowing over the shoulders of her blue jacket, and her saucy little mouth puckered into a soft whistle. She could see over the high wall now. The sun was going down behind the tall Lombardy poplars that lined the road, and in a distant field two peasants still at work reminded her of the picture of "The Angelus." They seemed like acquaintances on account of the resemblance, for there was a copy of the picture in her little bedroom at home.

All around her stretched quiet fields, sloping down to the ancient village of St. Symphorien and the river Loire. Just across the river, so near that she could hear the ringing of the cathedral bell, lay the famous old town of Tours. There was something in these country sights and sounds that soothed her with their homely cheerfulness. The crowing

of a rooster and the barking of a dog fell on her ear like familiar music.

"It's a comfort to hear something speak English," she sighed, "even if it's nothing but a chicken. I do wish that Cousin Kate wouldn't be so particular about my using French all day long. The one little half-hour at bedtime when she allows me to speak English isn't a drop in the bucket. It's a mercy that I had studied French some before I came, or I would have a lonesome time. I wouldn't be able to ever talk at all."

It was getting cold up in the pear-tree. Joyce shivered and stepped down to the limb below, but paused in her descent to watch a peddler going down the road with a pack on his back.

"Oh, he is stopping at the gate with the big scissors!" she cried, so interested that she spoke aloud. "I must wait to see if it opens."

There was something mysterious about that gate across the road. Like Monsieur Gréville's, it was plain and solid, reaching as high as the wall. Only the lime-trees and the second-story windows of the house could be seen above it. On the top it bore an iron medallion, on which was fastened a huge pair of scissors. There was a smaller pair on each gable of the house, also.

During the three months that Joyce had been in Monsieur Gréville's home, she had watched every day to see it open; but if any one ever entered or left the place, it was certainly by some other way than this queer gate.

What lay beyond it, no one could tell. She had questioned Gabriel the coachman, and Berthé the maid, in vain. Madame Gréville said that she remembered having heard, when a child, that the man who built it was named Ciseaux, and that

was why the symbol of this name was hung over the gate and on the gables. He had been regarded as half-crazy by his neighbours. The place was still owned by a descendant of his, who had gone to Algiers, and left it in charge of two servants.

The peddler rang the bell of the gate several times, but failing to arouse any one, shouldered his pack and went off grumbling. Then Joyce climbed down and walked slowly up the gravelled path to the house. Cousin Kate had just come back from Tours in the pony cart, and was waiting in the door to see if Gabriel had all the bundles that she had brought out with her.

Joyce followed her admiringly into the house. She wished that she could grow up to look exactly like Cousin Kate, and wondered if she would ever wear such stylish silk-lined skirts, and catch them

up in such an airy, graceful way when she ran up-stairs; and if she would ever have a Paris hat with long black feathers, and always wear a bunch of sweet violets on her coat.

She looked at herself in Cousin Kate's mirror as she passed it, and sighed. "Well, I am better-looking than when I left home," she thought. "That's one comfort. My face isn't freckled now, and my hair is more becoming this way than in tight little pigtails, the way I used to wear it."

Cousin Kate, coming up behind her, looked over her head and smiled at the attractive reflection of Joyce's rosy cheeks and straightforward gray eyes. Then she stopped suddenly and put her arms around her, saying, "What's the matter, dear? You have been crying."

"Nothing," answered Joyce, but there was a quaver in her voice, and she turned

her head aside. Cousin Kate put her hand under the resolute little chin, and tilted it until she could look into the eyes that dropped under her gaze. "You have been crying," she said again, this time in English, "crying because you are homesick. I wonder if it would not be a good occupation for you to open all the bundles that I got this afternoon. There is a saucepan in one, and a big spoon in the other, and all sorts of good things in the others, so that we can make some molasses candy here in my room, over the open fire. While it cooks you can curl up in the big armchair and listen to a fairy-tale in the firelight. Would you like that, little one?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Joyce, ecstatically. "That's what they are doing at home this minute, I am sure. We always make candy every afternoon in the winter time."

Presently the saucepan was sitting on the coals, and Joyce's little pug nose was rapturously sniffing the odour of bubbling molasses.

"I know what I'd like the story to be about," she said, as she stirred the delicious mixture with the new spoon. "Make up something about the big gate across the road, with the scissors on it."

Cousin Kate crossed the room, and sat down by the window, where she could look out and see the top of it.

"Let me think for a few minutes," she said. "I have been very much interested in that old gate myself."

She thought so long that the candy was done before she was ready to tell the story; but while it cooled in plates outside on the window-sill, she drew Joyce to a seat beside her in the chimney-corner. With her feet on the fender,

and the child's head on her shoulder, she began this story, and the firelight, dancing on the walls, showed a smile on Joyce's contented little face.

CHAPTER II

A NEW FAIRY-TALE

NCE upon a time, on a far island of the sea, there lived a King with seven sons. The three eldest were tall and dark, with eyes like eagles, and hair like a crow's wing for blackness, and no princes in all the land were so strong and fearless as they. The three youngest sons were tall and fair, with eyes as blue as corn-flowers, and locks like the summer sun for brightness, and no princes in all the land were so brave and beautiful as they.

But the middle son was little and lorn; he was neither dark nor fair; he was neither handsome nor strong. So when the King saw that he never won in the tournaments nor led in the boar hunts, nor sang to his lute among the ladies of the court, he drew his royal robes around him, and henceforth frowned on Ethelried.

To each of his other sons he gave a portion of his kingdom, armour, and plumes, a prancing charger, and a trusty sword; but to Ethelried he gave nothing. When the poor prince saw his brothers riding out into the world to win their fortunes, he fain would have followed. Throwing himself on his knees before the King, he cried, "Oh, royal Sire, bestow upon me also a sword and a steed, that I may up and away to follow my brethren."

But the King laughed him to scorn.

"Thou a sword!" he quoth. "Thou who hast never done a deed of valour in all thy life! In sooth thou shalt have one, but it shall be one befitting thy maiden size and courage, if so small a weapon can be found in all my kingdom!"

Now just at that moment it happened that the Court Tailor came into the room to measure the King for a new mantle of ermine. Forthwith the grinning Jester began shrieking with laughter, so that the bells upon his motley cap were all set a-jangling.

"What now, Fool?" demanded the King.

"I did but laugh to think the sword of Ethelried had been so quickly found," responded the Jester, and he pointed to the scissors hanging from the Tailor's girdle.

"By my troth," exclaimed the King, "it shall be even as thou sayest!" and

he commanded that the scissors be taken from the Tailor, and buckled to the belt of Ethelried.

"Not until thou hast proved thyself a prince with these shalt thou come into thy kingdom," he swore with a mighty oath. "Until that far day, now get thee gone!"

So Ethelried left the palace, and wandered away over mountain and moor with a heavy heart. No one knew that he was a prince; no fireside offered him welcome; no lips gave him a friendly greeting. The scissors hung useless and rusting by his side.

One night as he lay in a deep forest, too unhappy to sleep, he heard a noise near at hand in the bushes. By the light of the moon he saw that a ferocious wild beast had been caught in a hunter's snare, and was struggling to free itself from the heavy net. His first thought was to slay

the animal, for he had had no meat for many days. Then he bethought himself that he had no weapon large enough.

While he stood gazing at the struggling beast, it turned to him with such a beseeching look in its wild eyes that he was moved to pity.

"Thou shalt have thy liberty," he cried, "even though thou shouldst rend me in pieces the moment thou art free. Better dead than this craven life to which my father hath doomed me!"

So he set to work with the little scissors to cut the great ropes of the net in twain. At first each strand seemed as hard as steel, and the blades of the scissors were so rusty and dull that he could scarcely move them. Great beads of sweat stood out on his brow as he bent himself to the task.

Presently, as he worked, the blades began to grow sharper and sharper, and

"In its place stood a beautiful Fairy with filmy wings"

brighter and brighter, and longer and longer. By the time that the last rope was cut the scissors were as sharp as a broadsword, and half as long as his body.

At last he raised the net to let the beast go free. Then he sank on his knees in astonishment. It had suddenly disappeared, and in its place stood a beautiful Fairy with filmy wings, which shone like rainbows in the moonlight.

"Prince Ethelried," she said in a voice that was like a crystal bell's for sweetness, "dost thou not know that thou art in the domain of a frightful Ogre? It was he who changed me into the form of a wild beast, and set the snare to capture me. But for thy fearlessness and faithful perseverance in the task which thou didst in pity undertake, I must have perished at dawn."

At this moment there was a distant

rumbling as of thunder. "'Tis the Ogre!" cried the Fairy. "We must hasten." Seizing the scissors that lay on the ground where Ethelried had dropped them, she opened and shut them several times, exclaiming:

"Scissors, grow a giant's height
And save us from the Ogre's might!"

Immediately they grew to an enormous size, and, with blades extended, shot through the tangled thicket ahead of them, cutting down everything that stood in their way, — bushes, stumps, trees, vines; nothing could stand before the fierce onslaught of those mighty blades.

The Fairy darted down the path thus opened up, and Ethelried followed as fast as he could, for the horrible roaring was rapidly coming nearer. At last they reached a wide chasm that bounded the Ogre's domain. Once across that, they

would be out of his power, but it seemed impossible to cross. Again the Fairy touched the scissors, saying:

"Giant scissors, bridge the path,
And save us from the Ogre's wrath."

Again the scissors grew longer and longer, until they lay across the chasm like a shining bridge. Ethelried hurried across after the Fairy, trembling and dizzy, for the Ogre was now almost upon them. As soon as they were safe on the other side, the Fairy blew upon the scissors, and, presto, they became shorter and shorter until they were only the length of an ordinary sword.

"Here," she said, giving them into his hands; "because thou wast persevering and fearless in setting me free, these shall win for thee thy heart's desire. But remember that thou canst not keep them sharp and shining unless they are

used at least once each day in some unselfish service."

Before he could thank her she had vanished, and he was left in the forest alone. He could see the Ogre standing powerless to hurt him, on the other side of the chasm, and gnashing his teeth, each one of which was as big as a millstone.

The sight was so terrible that he turned on his heel, and fled away as fast as his feet could carry him. By the time he reached the edge of the forest he was very tired, and ready to faint from hunger. His heart's greatest desire being for food, he wondered if the scissors could obtain it for him as the Fairy had promised. He had spent his last coin and knew not where to go for another.

Just then he spied a tree, hanging full of great, yellow apples. By standing on tiptoe he could barely reach the lowest one with his scissors. He cut off an

apple, and was about to take a bite, when an old Witch sprang out of a hollow tree across the road.

"So you are the thief who has been stealing my gold apples all this last fortnight!" she exclaimed. "Well, you shall never steal again, that I promise you. Ho, Frog-eye Fearsome, seize on him and drag him into your darkest dungeon!"

At that, a hideous-looking fellow, with eyes like a frog's, green hair, and horrid clammy webbed fingers, clutched him before he could turn to defend himself. He was thrust into the dungeon and left there all day.

At sunset, Frog-eye Fearsome opened the door to slide in a crust and a cup of water, saying in a croaking voice, "You shall be hanged in the morning, hanged by the neck until you are quite dead." Then he stopped to run his webbed fingers through his damp green hair, and

grin at the poor captive Prince, as if he enjoyed his suffering. But the next morning no one came to take him to the gallows, and he sat all day in total darkness. At sunset Frog-eye Fearsome opened the door again to thrust in another crust and some water and say, " In the morning you shall be drowned; drowned in the Witch's mill-pond with a great stone tied to your heels."

Again the croaking creature stood and gloated over his victim, then left him to the silence of another long day in the dungeon. The third day he opened the door and hopped in, rubbing his webbed hands together with fiendish pleasure, saying, " You are to have no food and drink to-night, for the Witch has thought of a far more horrible punishment for you. In the morning I shall surely come again, and then — beware! "

Now as he stopped to grin once more

at the poor Prince, a Fly darted in, and, blinded by the darkness of the dungeon, flew straight into a spider's web, above the head of Ethelried.

"Poor creature!" thought Ethelried. "Thou shalt not be left a prisoner in this dismal spot while I have the power to help thee." He lifted the scissors and with one stroke destroyed the web, and gave the Fly its freedom.

As soon as the dungeon had ceased to echo with the noise that Frog-eye Fearsome made in banging shut the heavy door, Ethelried heard a low buzzing near his ear. It was the Fly, which had alighted on his shoulder.

"Let an insect in its gratitude teach you this," buzzed the Fly. "To-morrow, if you remain here, you must certainly meet your doom, for the Witch never keeps a prisoner past the third night. But escape is possible. Your prison door

is of iron, but the shutter which bars the window is only of wood. Cut your way out at midnight, and I will have a friend in waiting to guide you to a place of safety. A faint glimmer of light on the opposite wall shows me the keyhole. I shall make my escape thereat and go to repay thy unselfish service to me. But know that the scissors move only when bidden in rhyme. Farewell."

The Prince spent all the following time until midnight trying to think of a suitable verse to say to the scissors. The art of rhyming had been neglected in his early education, and it was not until the first cockcrowing began that he succeeded in making this one:

"Giant scissors, serve me well,
And save me from the Witch's spell!"

As he uttered the words the scissors leaped out of his hand, and began to

cut through the wooden shutters as easily as through a cheese. In a very short time the Prince had crawled through the opening. There he stood, outside the dungeon, but it was a dark night and he knew not which way to turn.

He could hear Frog-eye Fearsome snoring like a tempest up in the watch-tower, and the old Witch was talking in her sleep in seven languages. While he stood looking around him in bewilderment, a Firefly alighted on his arm. Flashing its little lantern in the Prince's face, it cried, "This way! My friend, the Fly, sent me to guide you to a place of safety. Follow me and trust entirely to my guidance."

The Prince flung his mantle over his shoulder, and followed on with all possible speed. They stopped first in the Witch's orchard, and the Firefly held its lantern up while the Prince filled his

pockets with the fruit. The apples were gold with emerald leaves, and the cherries were rubies, and the grapes were great bunches of amethyst. When the Prince had filled his pockets, he had enough wealth to provide for all his wants for at least a twelvemonth.

The Firefly led him on until they came to a town where was a fine inn. There he left him, and flew off to report the Prince's safety to the Fly and receive the promised reward.

Here Ethelried stayed for many weeks, living like a king on the money that the fruit jewels brought him. All this time the scissors were becoming little and rusty, because he never once used them, as the Fairy bade him, in unselfish service for others. But one day he bethought himself of her command, and started out to seek some opportunity to help somebody.

Soon he came to a tiny hut where a sick man lay moaning, while his wife and children wept beside him. "What is to become of me?" cried the poor peasant. "My grain must fall and rot in the field from overripeness because I have not the strength to rise and harvest it; then indeed must we all starve."

Ethelried heard him, and that night, when the moon rose, he stole into the field to cut it down with the giant scissors. They were so rusty from long idleness that he could scarcely move them. He tried to think of some rhyme with which to command them; but it had been so long since he had done any thinking, except for his own selfish pleasure, that his brain refused to work.

However, he toiled on all night, slowly cutting down the grain stalk by stalk. Toward morning the scissors became brighter and sharper, until they finally

began to open and shut of their own accord. The whole field was cut by sunrise. Now the peasant's wife had risen very early to go down to the spring and dip up some cool water for her husband to drink. She came upon Ethelried as he was cutting the last row of the grain, and fell on her knees to thank him. From that day the peasant and all his family were firm friends of Ethelried's, and would have gone through fire and water to serve him.

After that he had many adventures, and he was very busy, for he never again forgot what the Fairy had said, that only unselfish service each day could keep the scissors sharp and shining. When the shepherd lost a little lamb one day on the mountain, it was Ethelried who found it caught by the fleece in a tangle of cruel thorns. When he had cut it loose and carried it home, the shepherd also became

his firm friend, and would have gone through fire and water to serve him.

The grandame whom he supplied with fagots, the merchant whom he rescued from robbers, the King's councillor to whom he gave aid, all became his friends. Up and down the land, to beggar or lord, homeless wanderer or high-born dame, he gladly gave unselfish service all unsought, and such as he helped straightway became his friends.

Day by day the scissors grew sharper and sharper and ever more quick to spring forward at his bidding.

One day a herald dashed down the highway, shouting through his silver trumpet that a beautiful Princess had been carried away by the Ogre. She was the only child of the King of this country, and the knights and nobles of all other realms and all the royal potentates were prayed to come to her rescue. To

him who could bring her back to her father's castle should be given the throne and kingdom, as well as the Princess herself.

So from far and near, indeed from almost every country under the sun, came knights and princes to fight the Ogre. One by one their brave heads were cut off and stuck on poles along the moat that surrounded the castle.

Still the beautiful Princess languished in her prison. Every night at sunset she was taken up to the roof for a glimpse of the sky, and told to bid good-bye to the sun, for the next morning would surely be her last. Then she would wring her lily-white hands and wave a sad farewell to her home, lying far to the westward. When the knights saw this they would rush down to the chasm and sound a challenge to the Ogre.

They were brave men, and they would

not have feared to meet the fiercest wild beasts, but many shrunk back when the Ogre came rushing out. They dared not meet in single combat, this monster with the gnashing teeth, each one of which was as big as a millstone.

Among those who drew back were Ethelried's brothers (the three that were dark and the three that were fair). They would not acknowledge their fear. They said, "We are only waiting to lay some wily plan to capture the Ogre."

After several days Ethelried reached the place on foot. "See him," laughed one of the brothers that was dark to one that was fair. "He comes afoot; no prancing steed, no waving plumes, no trusty sword; little and lorn, he is not fit to be called a brother to princes."

But Ethelried heeded not their taunts. He dashed across the drawbridge, and, opening his scissors, cried:

"Giant scissors, rise in power!
Grant me my heart's desire this hour!"

The crowds on the other side held their breath as the Ogre rushed out, brandishing a club as big as a church steeple. Then Whack! Bang! The blows of the scissors, warding off the blows of the mighty club, could be heard for miles around.

At last Ethelried became so exhausted that he could scarcely raise his hand, and it was plain to be seen that the scissors could not do battle much longer. By this time a great many people, attracted by the terrific noise, had come running up to the moat. The news had spread far and wide that Ethelried was in danger; so every one whom he had ever served dropped whatever he was doing, and ran to the scene of the battle. The peasant was there, and the shepherd, and the lords and beggars and high-born

dames, all those whom Ethelried had ever befriended.

As they saw that the poor Prince was about to be vanquished, they all began a great lamentation, and cried out bitterly.

"He saved my harvest," cried one. "He found my lamb," cried another. "He showed me a greater kindness still," shouted a third. And so they went on, each telling of some unselfish service that the Prince had rendered him. Their voices all joined at last into such a roar of gratitude that the scissors were given fresh strength on account of it. They grew longer and longer, and stronger and stronger, until with one great swoop they sprang forward and cut the ugly old Ogre's head from his shoulders.

Every cap was thrown up, and such cheering rent the air as has never been heard since. They did not know his

name, they did not know that he was Prince Ethelried, but they knew by his valour that there was royal blood in his veins. So they all cried out long and loud:

"Long live the Prince! Prince Ciseaux!"

Then the King stepped down from his throne and took off his crown to give to the conqueror, but Ethelried put it aside.

"Nay," he said. "The only kingdom that I crave is the kingdom of a loving heart and a happy fireside. Keep all but the Princess."

So the Ogre was killed, and the Prince came into his kingdom that was his heart's desire. He married the Princess, and there was feasting and merrymaking for seventy days and seventy nights, and they all lived happily ever after.

When the feasting was over, and the

guests had all gone to their homes, the Prince pulled down the house of the Ogre and built a new one. On every gable he fastened a pair of shining scissors to remind himself that only through unselfish service to others comes the happiness that is highest and best.

Over the great entrance gate he hung the ones that had served him so valiantly, saying, "Only those who belong to the kingdom of loving hearts and happy homes can ever enter here."

One day the old King, with the brothers of Ethelried (the three that were dark and the three that were fair), came riding up to the portal. They thought to share in Ethelried's fame and splendour. But the scissors leaped from their place and snapped so angrily in their faces that they turned their horses and fled.

Then the scissors sprang back to their place again to guard the portal of Ethel-

ried, and, to this day, only those who belong to the kingdom of loving hearts may enter the Gate of the Giant Scissors.

CHAPTER III

BEHIND THE GREAT GATE

HAT was the tale of the giant scissors as it was told to Joyce in the pleasant fire-lighted room; but behind the great gates the true story went on in a far different way.

Back of the Ciseaux house was a dreary field, growing drearier and browner every moment as the twilight deepened; and across its rough furrows a tired boy was stumbling wearily homeward. He was not more than nine years old, but the careworn expression of his thin white

face might have belonged to a little old man of ninety. He was driving two unruly goats toward the house. The chase they led him would have been a laughable sight, had he not looked so small and forlorn plodding along in his clumsy wooden shoes, and a peasant's blouse of blue cotton, several sizes too large for his thin little body.

The anxious look in his eyes changed to one of fear as he drew nearer the house. At the sound of a gruff voice bellowing at him from the end of the lane, he winced as if he had been struck.

"Ha, there, Jules! Thou lazy vagabond! Late again! Canst thou never learn that I am not to be kept waiting?"

"But, Brossard," quavered the boy in his shrill, anxious voice, "it was not my fault, indeed it was not. The goats were

"He was driving two unruly goats"

so stubborn to-night. They broke through the hedge, and I had to chase them over three fields."

"Have done with thy lying excuses," was the rough answer. "Thou shalt have no supper to-night. Maybe an empty stomach will teach thee when my commands fail. Hasten and drive the goats into the pen."

There was a scowl on Brossard's burly red face that made Jules's heart bump up in his throat. Brossard was only the caretaker of the Ciseaux place, but he had been there for twenty years, — so long that he felt himself the master. The real master was in Algiers nearly all the time. During his absence the great house was closed, excepting the kitchen and two rooms above it. Of these Brossard had one and Henri the other. Henri was the cook; a slow, stupid old man, not to be jogged out of either his good nature or

his slow gait by anything that Brossard might say.

Henri cooked and washed and mended, and hoed in the garden. Brossard worked in the fields and shaved down the expenses of their living closer and closer. All that was thus saved fell to his share, or he might not have watched the expenses so carefully.

Much saving had made him miserly. Old Therese, the woman with the fish-cart, used to say that he was the stingiest man in all Touraine. She ought to know, for she had sold him a fish every Friday during all those twenty years, and he had never once failed to quarrel about the price. Five years had gone by since the master's last visit. Brossard and Henri were not likely to forget that time, for they had been awakened in the dead of night by a loud knocking at the side gate. When they opened it the sight that

greeted them made them rub their sleepy eyes to be sure that they saw aright.

There stood the master, old Martin Ciseaux. His hair and fiercely bristling moustache had turned entirely white since they had last seen him. In his arms he carried a child.

Brossard almost dropped his candle in his first surprise, and his wonder grew until he could hardly contain it, when the curly head raised itself from monsieur's shoulder, and the sleepy baby voice lisped something in a foreign tongue.

"By all the saints!" muttered Brossard, as he stood aside for his master to pass.

"It's my brother Jules's grandson," was the curt explanation that monsieur offered. "Jules is dead, and so is his son and all the family, — died in America. This is his son's son, Jules, the last of the name. If I choose to take him from

a foreign poorhouse and give him shelter, it's nobody's business, Louis Brossard, but my own."

With that he strode on up the stairs to his room, the boy still in his arms. This sudden coming of a four-year-old child into their daily life made as little difference to Brossard and Henri as the presence of the four-months-old puppy. They spread a cot for him in Henri's room when the master went back to Algiers. They gave him something to eat three times a day when they stopped for their own meals, and then went on with their work as usual.

It made no difference to them that he sobbed in the dark for his mother to come and sing him to sleep, — the happy young mother who had petted and humoured him in her own fond American fashion. They could not understand his speech; more than that, they could not under-

stand him. Why should he mope alone in the garden with that beseeching look of a lost dog in his big, mournful eyes? Why should he not play and be happy, like the neighbour's children or the kittens or any other young thing that had life and sunshine?

Brossard snapped his fingers at him sometimes at first, as he would have done to a playful animal; but when Jules drew back, frightened by his foreign speech and rough voice, he began to dislike the timid child. After awhile he never noticed him except to push him aside or to find fault.

It was from Henri that Jules picked up whatever French he learned, and it was from Henri also that he had received the one awkward caress, and the only one, that his desolate little heart had known in all the five loveless years that he had been with them.

A few months ago Brossard had put him out in the field to keep the goats from straying away from their pasture, two stubborn creatures, whose self-willed wanderings had brought many a scolding down on poor Jules's head. To-night he was unusually unfortunate, for added to the weary chase they had led him was this stern command that he should go to bed without his supper.

He was about to pass into the house, shivering and hungry, when Henri put his head out at the window. "Brossard," he called, "there isn't enough bread for supper; there's just this dry end of a loaf. You should have bought as I told you, when the baker's cart stopped here this morning."

Brossard slowly measured the bit of hard, black bread with his eye, and, seeing that there was not half enough to satisfy the appetites of two hungry men,

he grudgingly drew a franc from his pocket.

"Here, Jules," he called. "Go down to the bakery, and see to it that thou art back by the time that I have milked the goats, or thou shalt go to bed with a beating, as well as supperless. Stay!" he added, as Jules turned to go. "I have a mind to eat white bread to-night instead of black. It will cost an extra sou, so be careful to count the change. It is only once or so in a twelvemonth," he muttered to himself as an excuse for his extravagance.

It was half a mile to the village, but down-hill all the way, so that Jules reached the bakery in a very short time.

Several customers were ahead of him, however, and he awaited his turn nervously. When he left the shop an old lamplighter was going down the street

with torch and ladder, leaving a double line of twinkling lights in his wake, as he disappeared down the wide "Paris road." Jules watched him a moment, and then ran rapidly on. For many centuries the old village of St. Symphorien had echoed with the clatter of wooden shoes on its ancient cobblestones; but never had footfalls in its narrow, crooked streets kept time to the beating of a lonelier little heart.

The officer of Customs, at his window beside the gate that shuts in the old town at night, nodded in a surly way as the boy hurried past. Once outside the gate, Jules walked more slowly, for the road began to wind up-hill. Now he was out again in the open country, where a faint light lying over the frosty fields showed that the moon was rising.

Here and there lamps shone from the windows of houses along the road; across

the field came the bark of a dog, welcoming his master; two old peasant women passed him in a creaking cart on their glad way home.

At the top of the hill Jules stopped to take breath, leaning for a moment against the stone wall. He was faint from hunger, for he had been in the fields since early morning, with nothing for his midday lunch but a handful of boiled chestnuts. The smell of the fresh bread tantalized him beyond endurance. Oh, to be able to take a mouthful, — just one little mouthful of that brown, sweet crust!

He put his face down close, and shut his eyes, drawing in the delicious odour with long, deep breaths. What bliss it would be to have that whole loaf for his own, — he, little Jules, who was to have no supper that night! He held it up in the moonlight, hungrily looking at it on

every side. There was not a broken place to be found anywhere on its surface; not one crack in all that hard, brown glaze of crust, from which he might pinch the tiniest crumb.

For a moment a mad impulse seized him to tear it in pieces, and eat every scrap, regardless of the reckoning with Brossard afterward. But it was only for a moment. The memory of his last beating stayed his hand. Then, fearing to dally with temptation, lest it should master him, he thrust the bread under his arm, and ran every remaining step of the way home.

Brossard took the loaf from him, and pointed with it to the stairway, — a mute command for Jules to go to bed at once. Tingling with a sense of injustice, the little fellow wanted to shriek out in all his hunger and misery, defying this monster of a man; but a struggling sparrow

might as well have tried to turn on the hawk that held it. He clenched his hands to keep from snatching something from the table, set out so temptingly in the kitchen, but he dared not linger even to look at it. With a feeling of utter helplessness he passed it in silence, his face white and set.

Dragging his tired feet slowly up the stairs, he went over to the casement window, and swung it open; then, kneeling down, he laid his head on the sill, in the moonlight. Was it his dream that came back to him then, or only a memory? He could never be sure, for if it were a memory, it was certainly as strange as any dream, unlike anything he had ever known in his life with Henri and Brossard. Night after night he had comforted himself with the picture that it brought before him.

He could see a little white house in the

middle of a big lawn. There were vines on the porches, and it must have been early in the evening, for the fireflies were beginning to twinkle over the lawn. And the grass had just been cut, for the air was sweet with the smell of it. A woman, standing on the steps under the vines, was calling "Jules, Jules, it is time to come in, little son!"

But Jules, in his white dress and shoulder-knots of blue ribbon, was toddling across the lawn after a firefly.

Then she began to call him another way. Jules had a vague idea that it was a part of some game that they sometimes played together. It sounded like a song, and the words were not like any that he had ever heard since he came to live with Henri and Brossard. He could not forget them, though, for had they not sung themselves through that beautiful dream every time he had it?

"Little Boy Blue, oh, where are you?
Oh, where are you-u-u-u?"

He only laughed in the dream picture and ran on after the firefly. Then a man came running after him, and, catching him, tossed him up laughingly, and carried him to the house on his shoulder.

Somebody held a glass of cool, creamy milk for him to drink, and by and by he was in a little white nightgown in the woman's lap. His head was nestled against her shoulder, and he could feel her soft lips touching him on cheeks and eyelids and mouth, before she began to sing:

"Oh, little Boy Blue, lay by your horn,
And mother will sing of the cows and the corn,
Till the stars and the angels come to keep
Their watch, where my baby lies fast asleep."

Now all of a sudden Jules knew that there was another kind of hunger worse than the longing for bread. He wanted

the soft touch of those lips again on his mouth and eyelids, the loving pressure of those restful arms, a thousand times more than he had wished for the loaf that he had just brought home. Two hot tears, that made his eyes ache in their slow gathering, splashed down on the window-sill.

Down below Henri opened the kitchen door and snapped his fingers to call the dog. Looking out, Jules saw him set a plate of bones on the step. For a moment he listened to the animal's contented crunching, and then crept across the room to his cot, with a little moan. "O-o-oh — o-oh!" he sobbed. "Even the dog has more than I have, and I'm so hungry!" He hid his head awhile in the old quilt; then he raised it again, and, with the tears streaming down his thin little face, sobbed in a heart-broken whisper:

"Mother! Mother! Do you know how hungry I am?"

A clatter of knives and forks from the kitchen below was the only answer, and he dropped despairingly down again.

"She's so far away she can't even hear me!" he moaned. "Oh, if I could only be dead, too!"

He lay there, crying, till Henri had finished washing the supper dishes and had put them clumsily away. The rank odour of tobacco, stealing up the stairs, told him that Brossard had settled down to enjoy his evening pipe. Through the casement window that was still ajar came the faint notes of an accordeon from Monsieur Gréville's garden, across the way. Gabriel, the coachman, was walking up and down in the moonlight, playing a wheezy accompaniment to the only song he knew. Jules did not notice it at first, but after awhile, when he had cried

himself quiet, the faint melody began to steal soothingly into his consciousness. His eyelids closed drowsily, and then the accordeon seemed to be singing something to him. He could not understand at first, but just as he was dropping off to sleep he heard it quite clearly:

"Till the stars and the angels come to keep
Their watch, where my baby lies fast asleep."

Late in the night Jules awoke with a start, and sat up, wondering what had aroused him. He knew that it must be after midnight, for the moon was nearly down. Henri was snoring. Suddenly such a strong feeling of hunger came over him, that he could think of nothing else. It was like a gnawing pain. As if he were being led by some power outside of his own will, he slipped to the door of the room. The little bare feet made no noise on the carpetless floor. No

mouse could have stolen down the stairs more silently than timid little Jules. The latch of the kitchen door gave a loud click that made him draw back with a shiver of alarm; but that was all. After waiting one breathless minute, his heart beating like a trip-hammer, he went on into the pantry.

The moon was so far down now, that only a white glimmer of light showed him the faint outline of things; but his keen little nose guided him. There was half a cheese on the swinging shelf, with all the bread that had been left from supper. He broke off great pieces of each in eager haste. Then he found a crock of goat's milk. Lifting it to his mouth, he drank with big, quick gulps until he had to stop for breath. Just as he was about to raise it to his lips again, some instinct of danger made him look up. There in the doorway stood Brossard,

bigger and darker and more threatening than he had ever seemed before.

A frightened little gasp was all that the child had strength to give. He turned so sick and faint that his nerveless fingers could no longer hold the crock. It fell to the floor with a crash, and the milk spattered all over the pantry. Jules was too terrified to utter a sound. It was Brossard who made the outcry. Jules could only shut his eyes and crouch down trembling, under the shelf. The next instant he was dragged out, and Brossard's merciless strap fell again and again on the poor shrinking little body, that writhed under the cruel blows.

Once more Jules dragged himself upstairs to his cot, this time bruised and sore, too exhausted for tears, too hopeless to think of possible to-morrows.

Poor little prince in the clutches of the ogre! If only fairy-tales might be true!

If only some gracious spirit of elfin lore might really come at such a time with its magic wand of healing! Then there would be no more little desolate hearts, no more grieved little faces with undried tears upon them in all the earth. Over every threshold where a child's wee feet had pattered in and found a home, it would hang its guardian Scissors of Avenging, so that only those who belong to the kingdom of loving hearts and gentle hands would ever dare to enter.

CHAPTER IV

A LETTER AND A MEETING

EARLY a week later Joyce sat at her desk, hurrying to finish a letter before the postman's arrival.

"Dear Jack," it began. "You and Mary will each get a letter this week. Hers is the fairy-tale that Cousin Kate told me, about an old gate near here. I wrote it down as well as I could remember. I wish you could see that gate. It gets more interesting every day, and I'd give most anything to see what lies on the other side.

Maybe I shall soon, for Marie has a way of finding out anything she wants to know. Marie is my new maid. Cousin Kate went to Paris last week, to be gone until nearly Christmas, so she got Marie to take care of me.

"It seems so odd to have somebody button my boots and brush my hair, and take me out to walk as if I were a big doll. I have to be very dignified and act as if I had always been used to such things. I believe Marie would be shocked to death if she knew that I had ever washed dishes, or pulled weeds out of the pavement, or romped with you in the barn.

"Yesterday when we were out walking I got so tired of acting as if I were a hundred years old, that I felt as if I should scream. 'Marie,' I said, 'I've a mind to throw my muff in the fence-corner and run and hang on behind that

wagon that's going down-hill.' She had no idea that I was in earnest. She just smiled very politely and said, 'Oh, mademoiselle, impossible! How you Americans do love to jest.' But it was no joke. You can't imagine how stupid it is to be with nobody but grown people all the time. I'm fairly aching for a good old game of hi spy or prisoner's base with you. There is nothing at all to do, but to take poky walks.

"Yesterday afternoon we walked down to the river. There's a double row of trees along it on this side, and several benches where people can wait for the tram-cars that pass down this street and then across the bridge into Tours. Marie found an old friend of hers sitting on one of the benches, — such a big fat woman, and, oh, such a gossip! Marie said she was tired, so we sat there a long time. Her friend's name is Clotilde Robard.

They talked about everybody in St. Symphorien.

"Then I gossiped, too. I asked Clotilde Robard if she knew why the gate with the big scissors was never opened any more. She told me that she used to be one of the maids there, before she married the spice-monger and was Madame Robard. Years before she went to live there, when the old Monsieur Ciseaux died, there was a dreadful quarrel about some money. The son that got the property told his brother and sister never to darken his doors again.

"They went off to America, and that big front gate has never been opened since they passed out of it. Clotilde says that some people say that they put a curse on it, and something awful will happen to the first one who dares to go through. Isn't that interesting?

"The oldest son, Mr. Martin Ciseaux,

kept up the place for a long time, just as his father had done, but he never married. All of a sudden he shut up the house, sent away all the servants but the two who take care of it, and went off to Algiers to live. Five years ago he came back to bring his little grandnephew, but nobody has seen him since that time.

"Clotilde says that an orphan asylum would have been a far better home for Jules (that is the boy's name), for Brossard, the caretaker, is so mean to him. Doesn't that make you think of Prince Ethelried in the fairy-tale? 'Little and lorn; no fireside welcomed him and no lips gave him a friendly greeting.'

"Marie says that she has often seen Jules down in the field, back of his uncle's house, tending the goats. I hope that I may see him sometime.

"Oh, dear, the postman has come sooner than I expected. He is talking

down in the hall now, and if I do not post this letter now it will miss the evening train and be too late for the next mail steamer. Tell mamma that I will answer all her questions about my lessons and clothes next week. Oceans of love to everybody in the dear little brown house."

Hastily scrawling her name, Joyce ran out into the hall with her letter. "Anything for me?" she asked, anxiously, leaning over the banister to drop the letter into Marie's hand. "One, mademoiselle," was the answer. "But it has not a foreign stamp."

"Oh, from Cousin Kate!" exclaimed Joyce, tearing it open as she went back to her room. At the door she stooped to pick up a piece of paper that had dropped from the envelope. It crackled stiffly as she unfolded it.

"Money!" she exclaimed in surprise. "A whole twenty-franc note. What could Cousin Kate have sent it for?" The last page of the letter explained.

"I have just remembered that December is not very far off, and that whatever little Christmas gifts we send home should soon be started on their way. Enclosed you will find twenty francs for your Christmas shopping. It is not much, but we are too far away to send anything but the simplest little remembrances, things that will not be spoiled in the mail, and on which little or no duty need be paid. You might buy one article each day, so that there will be some purpose in your walks into Tours.

"I am sorry that I cannot be with you on Thanksgiving Day. We will have to drop it from our calendar this year; not the thanksgiving itself, but the turkey

and mince pie part. Suppose you take a few francs to give yourself some little treat to mark the day. I hope my dear little girl will not be homesick all by herself. I never should have left just at this time if it had not been very necessary."

Joyce smoothed out the bank-note and looked at it with sparkling eyes. Twenty whole francs! The same as four dollars! All the money that she had ever had in her whole life put together would not have amounted to that much. Dimes were scarce in the little brown house, and even pennies seldom found their way into the children's hands when five pairs of little feet were always needing shoes, and five healthy appetites must be satisfied daily.

All the time that Joyce was pinning her treasure securely in her pocket and put-

ting on her hat and jacket, all the time that she was walking demurely down the road with Marie, she was planning different ways in which to spend her fortune.

"Mademoiselle is very quiet," ventured Marie, remembering that one of her duties was to keep up an improving conversation with her little mistress.

"Yes," answered Joyce, half-impatiently; "I've got something so lovely to think about, that I'd like to go back and sit down in the garden and just think and think until dark, without being interrupted by anybody."

This was Marie's opportunity. "Then mademoiselle might not object to stopping in the garden of the villa which we are now approaching," she said. "My friend, Clotilde Robard, is housekeeper there, and I have a very important message to deliver to her."

Joyce had no objection. "But, Marie," she said, as she paused at the gate, "I think I'll not go in. It is so lovely and warm out here in the sun that I'll just sit here on the steps and wait for you."

Five minutes went by and then ten. By that time Joyce had decided how to spend every centime in the whole twenty francs, and Marie had not returned. Another five minutes went by. It was dull, sitting there facing the lonely highway, down which no one ever seemed to pass. Joyce stood up, looked all around, and then slowly sauntered down the road a short distance.

Here and there in the crevices of the wall blossomed a few hardy wild flowers, which Joyce began to gather as she walked. "I'll go around this bend in the road and see what's there," she said to herself. "By that time Marie will surely be done with her messages."

No one was in sight in any direction, and feeling that no one could be in hearing distance, either, in such a deserted place, she began to sing. It was an old Mother Goose rhyme that she hummed over and over, in a low voice at first, but louder as she walked on.

Around the bend in the road there was nothing to be seen but a lonely field where two goats were grazing. On one side of it was a stone wall, on two others a tall hedge, but the side next her sloped down to the road, unfenced.

Joyce, with her hands filled with the yellow wild flowers, stood looking around her, singing the old rhyme, the song that she had taught the baby to sing before he could talk plainly:

"Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn,
The sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn.
Little Boy Blue, oh, where are you?
Oh, where are you-u-u-u?"

The gay little voice that had been rising higher and higher, sweet as any bird's, stopped suddenly in mid-air; for, as if in answer to her call, there was a rustling just ahead of her, and a boy who had been lying on his back, looking at the sky, slowly raised himself out of the grass.

For an instant Joyce was startled; then seeing by his wooden shoes and old blue cotton blouse that he was only a little peasant watching the goats, she smiled at him with a pleasant good morning.

He did not answer, but came toward her with a dazed expression on his face, as if he were groping his way through some strange dream. "It is time to go in!" he exclaimed, as if repeating some lesson learned long ago, and half-forgotten.

Joyce stared at him in open-mouthed

astonishment. The little fellow had spoken in English. "Oh, you must be Jules," she cried. "Aren't you? I've been wanting to find you for ever so long."

The boy seemed frightened, and did not answer, only looked at her with big, troubled eyes. Thinking that she had made a mistake, that she had not heard aright, Joyce spoke in French. He answered her timidly. She had not been mistaken; he was Jules; he had been asleep, he told her, and when he heard her singing, he thought it was his mother calling him as she used to do, and had started up expecting to see her at last. Where was she? Did mademoiselle know her? Surely she must if she knew the song.

It was on the tip of Joyce's tongue to tell him that everybody knew that song; that it was as familiar to the children at

home as the chirping of crickets on the hearth or the sight of dandelions in the spring-time. But some instinct warned her not to say it. She was glad afterward, when she found that it was sacred to him, woven in as it was with his one beautiful memory of a home. It was all he had, and the few words that Joyce's singing had startled from him were all that he remembered of his mother's speech.

If Joyce had happened upon him in any other way, it is doubtful if their acquaintance would have grown very rapidly. He was afraid of strangers; but coming as she did with the familiar song that was like an old friend, he felt that he must have known her sometime, — that other time when there was always a sweet voice calling, and fireflies twinkled across a dusky lawn.

Joyce was not in a hurry for Marie to

come now. She had a hundred questions to ask, and made the most of her time by talking very fast. "Marie will be frightened," she told Jules, "if she does not find me at the gate, and will think that the gipsies have stolen me. Then she will begin to hunt up and down the road, and I don't know what she would say if she came and found me talking to a strange child out in the fields, so I must hurry back. I am glad that I found you. I have been wishing so long for somebody to play with, and you seem like an old friend because you were born in America. I'm going to ask madame to ask Brossard to let you come over sometime."

Jules watched her as she hurried away, running lightly down the road, her fair hair flying over her shoulders and her short blue skirt fluttering. Once she looked back to wave her hand. Long

after she was out of sight he still stood looking after her, as one might gaze longingly after some visitant from another world. Nothing like her had ever dropped into his life before, and he wondered if he should ever see her again.

CHAPTER V

A THANKSGIVING BARBECUE

HIS doesn't seem a bit like Thanksgiving Day, Marie," said Joyce, plaintively, as she sat up in bed to take the early breakfast that her maid brought in, — a cup of chocolate and a roll.

"In our country the very minute you wake up you can feel that it is a holiday. Outdoors it's nearly always cold and gray, with everything covered with snow. Inside you can smell turkey and pies and all sorts of good spicy things. Here it

is so warm that the windows are open and flowers blooming in the garden, and there isn't a thing to make it seem different from any other old day."

Here her grumbling was interrupted by a knock at the door, and Madame Gréville's maid, Berthé, came in with a message.

"Madame and monsieur intend spending the day in Tours, and since Mademoiselle Ware has written that Mademoiselle Joyce is to have no lessons on this American holiday, they will be pleased to have her accompany them in the carriage. She can spend the morning with them there or return immediately with Gabriel."

"Of course I want to go," cried Joyce. "I love to drive. But I'd rather come back here to lunch and have it by myself in the garden. Berthé, ask madame if I can't have it served in the little kiosk at the end of the arbour."

As soon as she had received a most gracious permission, Joyce began to make a little plan. It troubled her conscience somewhat, for she felt that she ought to mention it to madame, but she was almost certain that madame would object, and she had set her heart on carrying it out.

"I won't speak about it now," she said to herself, "because I am not sure that I am going to do it. Mamma would think it was all right, but foreigners are so queer about some things."

Uncertain as Joyce may have been about her future actions, as they drove toward town, no sooner had madame and monsieur stepped from the carriage, on the Rue Nationale, than she was perfectly sure.

"Stop at the baker's, Gabriel," she ordered as they turned homeward, then at the big grocery on the corner. "Cousin

Kate told me to treat myself to something nice," she said apologetically to her conscience, as she gave up the twenty francs to the clerk to be changed.

If Gabriel wondered what was in the little parcels which she brought back to the carriage, he made no sign. He only touched his hat respectfully, as she gave the next order: "Stop where the road turns by the cemetery, Gabriel; at the house with the steps going up to an iron-barred gate. I'll be back in two or three minutes," she said, when she had reached it, and climbed from the carriage.

To his surprise, instead of entering the gate, she hurried on past it, around the bend in the road. In a little while she came running back, her shoes covered with damp earth, as if she had been walking in a freshly ploughed field.

If Gabriel's eyes could have followed her around that bend in the road, he

would have seen a sight past his understanding: Mademoiselle Joyce running at the top of her speed to meet a little goatherd in wooden shoes and blue cotton blouse, — a common little peasant goatherd.

"It's Thanksgiving Day, Jules," she announced, gasping, as she sank down on the ground beside him. "We're the only Americans here, and everybody has gone off; and Cousin Kate said to celebrate in some way. I'm going to have a dinner in the garden. I've bought a rabbit, and we'll dig a hole, and make a fire, and barbecue it the way Jack and I used to do at home. And we'll roast eggs in the ashes, and have a fine time. I've got a lemon tart and a little iced fruit-cake, too."

All this was poured out in such breathless haste, and in such a confusion of tongues, first a sentence of English and

then a word of French, that it is no wonder that Jules grew bewildered in trying to follow her. She had to begin again at the beginning, and speak very slowly, in order to make him understand that it was a feast-day of some kind, and that he, Jules, was invited to some sort of a strange, wonderful entertainment in Monsieur Gréville's garden. "But Brossard is away from home," said Jules, "and there is no one to watch the goats, and keep them from straying down the road. Still it would be just the same if he were home," he added, sadly. "He would not let me go, I am sure. I have never been out of sight of that roof since I first came here, except on errands to the village, when I had to run all the way back." He pointed to the peaked gables adorned by the scissors of his crazy old ancestor.

"Brossard isn't your father," cried Joyce, indignantly, "nor your uncle, nor

your cousin, nor anything else that has a right to shut you up that way. Isn't there a field with a fence all around it, that you could drive the goats into for a few hours?"

Jules shook his head.

"Well, I can't have my Thanksgiving spoiled for just a couple of old goats," exclaimed Joyce. "You'll have to bring them along, and we'll shut them up in the carriage-house. You come over in about an hour, and I'll be at the side gate waiting for you."

Joyce had always been a general in her small way. She made her plans and issued her orders both at home and at school, and the children accepted her leadership as a matter of course. Even if Jules had not been willing and anxious to go, it is doubtful if he could have mustered courage to oppose the arrangements that she made in such a masterful way;

but Jules had not the slightest wish to object to anything whatsoever that Joyce might propose.

It is safe to say that the old garden had never before even dreamed of such a celebration as the one that took place that afternoon behind its moss-coated walls. The time-stained statue of Eve, which stood on one side of the fountain, looked across at the weather-beaten figure of Adam, on the other side, in stony-eyed surprise. The little marble satyr in the middle of the fountain, which had been grinning ever since its endless shower-bath began, seemed to grin wider than ever, as it watched the children's strange sport.

Jules dug the little trench according to Joyce's directions, and laid the iron grating which she had borrowed from the cook across it, and built the fire underneath. "We ought to have something

especially patriotic and Thanksgivingey," said Joyce, standing on one foot to consider. "Oh, now I know," she cried, after a moment's thought. "Cousin Kate has a lovely big silk flag in the top of her trunk. I'll run and get that, and then I'll recite the 'Landing of the Pilgrims' to you while the rabbit cooks."

Presently a savoury odour began to steal along the winding paths of the garden, between the laurel-bushes, — a smell of barbecued meat sputtering over the fire. Above the door of the little kiosk, with many a soft swish of silken stirrings, hung the beautiful old flag. Then a clear little voice floated up through the pine-trees:

"My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing!"

All the time that Joyce sang, she was moving around the table, setting out the

plates and rattling cups and saucers. She could not keep a little quaver out of her voice, for, as she went on, all the scenes of all the times that she had sung that song before came crowding up in her memory. There were the Thanksgiving days in the church at home, and the Washington's birthdays at school, and two Decoration days, when, as a granddaughter of a veteran, she had helped scatter flowers over the soldiers' graves.

Somehow it made her feel so hopelessly far away from all that made life dear to be singing of that "sweet land of liberty" in a foreign country, with only poor little alien Jules for company.

Maybe that is why the boy's first lesson in patriotism was given so earnestly by his homesick little teacher. Something that could not be put into words stirred within him, as, looking up at the

soft silken flutterings of the old flag, he listened for the first time to the story of the Pilgrim Fathers.

The rabbit cooked slowly, so slowly that there was time for Jules to learn how to play mumble-peg while they waited. At last it was done, and Joyce proudly plumped it into the platter that had been waiting for it. Marie had already brought out a bountiful lunch, cold meats and salad and a dainty pudding. By the time that Joyce had added her contribution to the feast, there was scarcely an inch of the table left uncovered. Jules did not know the names of half the dishes.

Not many miles away from that old garden, scattered up and down the Loire throughout all the region of fair Touraine, rise the turrets of many an old château. Great banquet-halls, where kings and queens once feasted, still stand

as silent witnesses of a gay bygone court life; but never in any château or palace among them all was feast more thoroughly enjoyed than this impromptu dinner in the garden, where a little goatherd was the only guest.

It was an enchanted spot to Jules, made so by the magic of Joyce's wonderful gift of story-telling. For the first time in his life that he could remember, he heard of Santa Claus and Christmas trees, of Bluebeard and Aladdin's lamp, and all the dear old fairy-tales that were so entrancing he almost forgot to eat.

Then they played that he was the prince, Prince Ethelried, and that the goats in the carriage-house were his royal steeds, and that Joyce was a queen whom he had come to visit.

But it came to an end, as all beautiful things must do. The bells in the village rang four, and Prince Ethelried started

up as Cinderella must have done when the pumpkin coach disappeared. He was no longer a king's son; he was only Jules, the little goatherd, who must hurry back to the field before the coming of Brossard.

Joyce went with him to the carriage-house. Together they swung open the great door. Then an exclamation of dismay fell from Joyce's lips. All over the floor were scattered scraps of leather and cloth and hair, the kind used in upholstering. The goats had whiled away the hours of their imprisonment by chewing up the cushions of the pony-cart.

Jules turned pale with fright. Knowing so little of the world, he judged all grown people by his knowledge of Henri and Brossard. "Oh, what will they do to us?" he gasped.

"Nothing at all," answered Joyce, bravely, although her heart beat twice as

fast as usual as monsieur's accusing face rose up before her.

"It was all my fault," said Jules, ready to cry. "What must I do?" Joyce saw his distress, and with quick womanly tact recognized her duty as hostess. It would never do to let this, his first Thanksgiving Day, be clouded by a single unhappy remembrance. She would pretend that it was a part of their last game; so she waved her hand, and said, in a theatrical voice, "You forget, Prince Ethelried, that in the castle of Irmingarde she rules supreme. If it is the pleasure of your royal steeds to feed upon cushions, they shall not be denied, even though they choose my own coach pillows of gold-cloth and velour."

"But what if Gabriel should tell Brossard?" questioned Jules, his teeth almost chattering at the mere thought.

"Oh, never mind, Jules," she answered,

laughingly. "Don't worry about a little thing like that. I'll make it all right with madame as soon as she gets home."

Jules, with utmost faith in Joyce's power to do anything that she might undertake, drew a long breath of relief. Half a dozen times between the gate and the lane that led into the Ciseaux field, he turned around to wave his old cap in answer to the hopeful flutter of her little white handkerchief; but when he was out of sight she went back to the carriage-house and looked at the wreck of the cushions with a sinking heart. After that second look, she was not so sure of making it all right with madame.

Going slowly up to her room, she curled up in the window-seat to wait for the sound of the carriage wheels. The blue parrots on the wall-paper sat in their blue hoops in straight rows from floor to ceiling, and hung all their dismal

heads. It seemed to Joyce as if there were thousands of them, and that each one was more unhappy than any of the others. The blue roses on the bed-curtains, that had been in such gay blossom a few hours before, looked ugly and unnatural now.

Over the mantel hung a picture that had been a pleasure to Joyce ever since she had taken up her abode in this quaint blue room. It was called "A Message from Noël," and showed an angel flying down with gifts to fill a pair of little wooden shoes that some child had put out on a window-sill below. When madame had explained that the little French children put out their shoes for Saint Noël to fill, instead of hanging stockings for Santa Claus, Joyce had been so charmed with the picture that she declared that she intended to follow the French custom herself this year.

Now, even the picture looked different, since she had lost her joyful anticipations of Christmas. "It is all No-el to me now," she sobbed. "No tree, no Santa Claus, and now, since the money must go to pay for the goats' mischief, no presents for anybody in the dear little brown house at home,—not even mamma and the baby!"

A big salty tear trickled down the side of Joyce's nose and splashed on her hand; then another one. It was such a gloomy ending for her happy Thanksgiving Day. One consoling thought came to her in time to stop the deluge that threatened. "Anyway, Jules has had a good time for once in his life." The thought cheered her so much that, when Marie came in to light the lamps, Joyce was walking up and down the room with her hands behind her back, singing.

As soon as she was dressed for dinner,

she went down-stairs, but found no one in the drawing-room. A small fire burned cosily on the hearth, for the November nights were growing chilly. Joyce picked up a book and tried to read, but found herself looking toward the door fully as often as at the page before her. Presently she set her teeth together and swallowed hard, for there was a rustling in the hall. The portière was pushed aside and madame swept into the room in a dinner-gown of dark red velvet.

To Joyce's waiting eyes she seemed more imposing, more elegant, and more unapproachable than she had ever been before. At madame's entrance Joyce rose as usual, but when the red velvet train had swept on to a seat beside the fire, she still remained standing. Her lips seemed glued together after those first words of greeting.

"Be seated, mademoiselle," said the

lady, with a graceful motion of her hand toward a chair. "How have you enjoyed your holiday?"

Joyce gave a final swallow of the choking lump in her throat, and began her humble confession that she had framed up-stairs among the rows of dismal blue wall-paper parrots. She started with Clotilde Robard's story of Jules, told of her accidental meeting with him, of all that she knew of his hard life with Brossard, and of her longing for some one to play with. Then she acknowledged that she had planned the barbecue secretly, fearing that madame would not allow her to invite the little goatherd. At the conclusion, she opened the handkerchief which she had been holding tightly clenched in her hand, and poured its contents in the red velvet lap.

"There's all that is left of my Christmas money," she said, sadly, "seventeen

"'There's all that is left of my Christmas money,' she said, sadly"

francs and two sous. If it isn't enough to pay for the cushions, I'll write to Cousin Kate, and maybe she will lend me the rest."

Madame gathered up the handful of coin, and slowly rose. "It is only a step to the carriage-house," she said. "If you will kindly ring for Berthé to bring a lamp, we will look to see how much damage has been done."

It was an unusual procession that filed down the garden walk a few minutes later. First came Berthé, in her black dress and white cap, holding a lamp high above her head, and screwing her forehead into a mass of wrinkles as she peered out into the surrounding darkness. After her came madame, holding up her dress and stepping daintily along in her high-heeled little slippers. Joyce brought up the rear, stumbling along in the darkness of madame's large shadow, so ab-

sorbed in her troubles that she did not see the amused expression on the face of the grinning satyr in the fountain.

Eve, looking across at Adam, seemed to wink one of her stony eyes, as much as to say, "Humph! Somebody else has been getting into trouble. There's more kinds of forbidden fruit than one; pony-cart cushions, for instance."

Berthé opened the door, and madame stepped inside the carriage-house. With her skirts held high in both hands, she moved around among the wreck of the cushions, turning over a bit with the toe of her slipper now and then.

Madame wore velvet dinner-gowns, it is true, and her house was elegant in its fine old furnishings bought generations ago; but only her dressmaker and herself knew how many times those gowns had been ripped and cleaned and remodelled. It was only constant housewifely

skill that kept the antique furniture repaired and the ancient brocade hangings from falling into holes. None but a French woman, trained in petty economies, could have guessed how little money and how much thought was spent in keeping her table up to its high standard of excellence.

Now as she looked and estimated, counting the fingers of one hand with the thumb of the other, a wish stirred in her kind old heart that she need not take the child's money; but new cushions must be bought, and she must be just to herself before she could be generous to others. So she went on with her estimating and counting, and then called Gabriel to consult with him.

"Much of the same hair can be used again," she said, finally, "and the cushions were partly worn, so that it would not be right for you to have to bear the

whole expense of new ones. I shall keep sixteen, — no, I shall keep only fifteen francs of your money, mademoiselle. I am sorry to take any of it, since you have been so frank with me; but you must see that it would not be justice for me to have to suffer in consequence of your fault. In France, children do nothing without the permission of their elders, and it would be well for you to adopt the same rule, my dear mademoiselle."

Here she dropped two francs and two sous into Joyce's hand. It was more than she had dared to hope for. Now there would be at least a little picture-book apiece for the children at home.

This time Joyce saw the grin on the satyr's face when they passed the fountain. She was smiling herself when they entered the house, where monsieur was waiting to escort them politely in to dinner.

CHAPTER VI

JOYCE PLAYS GHOST

ONSIEUR CISEAUX was coming home to live. Gabriel brought the news when he came back from market. He had met Henri on the road and heard it from him. Monsieur was coming home. That was all they knew; as to the day or the hour, no one could guess. That was the way with monsieur, Henri said. He was so peculiar one never knew what to expect.

Although the work of opening the great house was begun immediately, and

a thorough cleaning was in progress from garret to cellar, Brossard did not believe that his master would really be at home before the end of the week. He made his own plans accordingly, although he hurried Henri relentlessly with the cleaning.

As soon as Joyce heard the news, she made an excuse to slip away, and ran down to the field to Jules. She found him paler than usual, and there was a swollen look about his eyes that made her think that maybe he had been crying.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Aren't you glad that your uncle is coming home?"

Jules gave a cautious glance over his shoulder toward the house, and then looked up at Joyce. Heretofore, some inward monitor of pride had closed his lips about himself whenever he had been with her, but, since the Thanksgiving

Day that had made them such firm friends, he had wished every hour that he could tell her of his troubles. He felt that she was the only person in the world who took any interest in him. Although she was only three years older than himself, she had that motherly little way with her that eldest daughters are apt to acquire when there is a whole brood of little brothers and sisters constantly claiming attention.

So when Joyce asked again, "What's the matter, Jules?" with so much anxious sympathy in her face and voice, the child found himself blurting out the truth.

"Brossard beat me again last night," he exclaimed. Then, in response to her indignant exclamation, he poured out the whole story of his ill-treatment. "See here!" he cried, in conclusion, unbuttoning his blouse and baring his thin little shoulders. Great red welts lay across

them, and one arm was blue with a big mottled bruise.

Joyce shivered and closed her eyes an instant to shut out the sight that brought the quick tears of sympathy.

"Oh, you poor little thing!" she cried. "I'm going to tell madame."

"No, don't!" begged Jules. "If Brossard ever found out that I had told anybody, I believe that he would half-kill me. He punishes me for the least thing. I had no breakfast this morning because I dropped an old plate and broke it."

"Do you mean to say," cried Joyce, "that you have been out here in the field since sunrise without a bite to eat?"

Jules nodded.

"Then I'm going straight home to get you something." Before he could answer, she was darting over the fields like a little flying squirrel.

"Oh, what if it were Jack!" she kept

repeating as she ran. "Dear old Jack, beaten and starved, without anybody to love him or say a kind word to him." The mere thought of such misfortune brought a sob.

In a very few minutes Jules saw her coming across the field again, more slowly this time, for both hands were full, and without their aid she had no way to steady the big hat that flapped forward into her eyes at every step. Jules eyed the food ravenously. He had not known how weak and hungry he was until then.

"It will not be like this when your uncle comes home," said Joyce, as she watched the big mouthfuls disappear down the grateful little throat. Jules shrugged his shoulders, answering tremulously, "Oh, yes, it will be lots worse. Brossard says that my Uncle Martin has a terrible temper, and that he turned his

poor sister and my grandfather out of the house one stormy night. Brossard says he shall tell him how troublesome I am, and likely he will turn me out, too. Or, if he doesn't do that, they will both whip me every day."

Joyce stamped her foot. "I don't believe it," she cried, indignantly. "Brossard is only trying to scare you. Your uncle is an old man now, so old that he must be sorry for the way he acted when he was young. Why, of course he must be," she repeated, "or he never would have brought you here when you were left a homeless baby. More than that, I believe he will be angry when he finds how you have been treated. Maybe he will send Brossard away when you tell him."

"I would not dare to tell him," said Jules, shrinking back at the bare suggestion.

"Then I dare," cried Joyce, with flashing eyes. "I am not afraid of Brossard or Henri or your uncle, or any man that I ever knew. What's more, I intend to march over here just as soon as your uncle comes home, and tell him right before Brossard how you have been treated."

Jules gasped in admiration of such reckless courage. "Seems to me Brossard himself would be afraid of you if you looked at him that way." Then his voice sank to a whisper. "Brossard is afraid of one thing, I've heard him tell Henri so, and that is ghosts. They talk about them every night when the wind blows hard and makes queer noises in the chimney. Sometimes they are afraid to put out their candles for fear some evil spirit might be in the room."

"I'm glad he is afraid of something, the mean old thing!" exclaimed Joyce.

For a few moments nothing more was said, but Jules felt comforted now that he had unburdened his long pent up little heart. He reached out for several blades of grass and began idly twisting them around his finger.

Joyce sat with her hands clasped over her knees, and a wicked little gleam in her eyes that boded mischief. Presently she giggled as if some amusing thought had occurred to her, and when Jules looked up inquiringly she began noiselessly clapping her hands together.

"I've thought of the best thing," she said. "I'll fix old Brossard now. Jack and I have played ghost many a time, and have even scared each other while we were doing it, because we were so frightful-looking. We put long sheets all over us and went about with pumpkin jack-o'-lanterns on our heads. Oh, we looked awful, all in white, with fire shining out

of those hideous eyes and mouths. If I knew when Brossard was likely to whip you again, I'd suddenly appear on the scene and shriek out like a banshee and make him stop. Wouldn't it be lovely?" she cried, more carried away with the idea the longer she thought of it. "Why, it would be like acting our fairy story. You are the Prince, and I will be the giant scissors and rescue you from the Ogre. Now let me see if I can think of a rhyme for you to say whenever you need me."

Joyce put her hands over her ears and began to mumble something that had no meaning whatever for Jules: "Ghost — post — roast — toast, — no, that will never do; need — speed — deed, — no! Help — yelp (I wish I could make him yelp), — friend — spend — lend, — that's it. I shall try that."

There was a long silence, during which

Joyce whispered to herself with closed eyes. "Now I've got it," she announced, triumphantly, "and it's every bit as good as Cousin Kate's:

"Giant scissors, fearless friend,
Hasten, pray, thy aid to lend.

"If you could just say that loud enough for me to hear, I'd come rushing in and save you."

Jules repeated the rhyme several times, until he was sure that he could remember it, and then Joyce stood up to go.

"Good-bye, fearless friend," said Jules. "I wish I were brave like you." Joyce smiled in a superior sort of way, much flattered by the new title. Going home across the field she held her head a trifle higher than usual, and carried on an imaginary conversation with Brossard, in which she made him quail before her scathing rebukes.

Joyce did not take her usual walk that afternoon. She spent the time behind locked doors busy with paste, scissors, and a big muff-box, the best foundation she could find for a jack-o'-lantern. First she covered the box with white paper and cut a hideous face in one side, — great staring eyes, and a frightful grinning mouth. With a bit of wire she fastened a candle inside and shut down the lid.

"Looks too much like a box yet," she said, after a critical examination. "It needs some hair and a beard. Wonder what I can make it of." She glanced all around the room for a suggestion, and then closed her eyes to think. Finally she went over to her bed, and, turning the covers back from one corner, began ripping a seam in the mattress. When the opening was wide enough she put in her thumb and finger and pulled out a handful of the curled hair. "I can eas-

ily put it back when I have used it, and sew up the hole in the mattress," she said to her conscience. "My! This is exactly what I needed."

The hair was mixed, white and black, coarse and curly as a negro's wool.

She covered the top of the pasteboard head with it, and was so pleased that she added long beard and fierce moustache to the already hideous mouth. When that was all done she took it into a dark closet and lighted the candle. The monster's head glared at her from the depth of the closet, and she skipped back and forth in front of it, wringing her hands in delight.

"Oh, if Jack could only see it! If he could only see it!" she kept exclaiming. "It is better than any pumpkin head we ever made, and scary enough to throw old Brossard into a fit. I can hardly wait until it is dark enough to go over."

Meanwhile the short winter day drew on toward the close. Jules, out in the field with the goats, walked back and forth, back and forth, trying to keep warm. Brossard, who had gone five miles down the Paris road to bargain about some grain, sat comfortably in a little tobacco shop, with a pipe in his mouth and a glass and bottle on the table at his elbow.

Henri was at home, still scrubbing and cleaning. The front of the great house was in order, with even the fires laid on all the hearths ready for lighting. Now he was scrubbing the back stairs. His brush bumped noisily against the steps, and the sound of its scouring was nearly drowned by the jerky tune which the old fellow sung through his nose as he worked.

A carriage drove slowly down the road and stopped at the gate with the scissors;

then, in obedience to some command from within, the vehicle drove on to the smaller gate beyond. An old man with white hair and bristling moustache slowly alighted. The master had come home. He put out his hand as if to ring the bell, then on second thought drew a key from his pocket and fitted it in the lock. The gates swung back and he passed inside. The old house looked gray and forbidding in the dull light of the late afternoon. He frowned up at it, and it frowned down on him, standing there as cold and grim as itself. That was his only welcome.

The doors and windows were all shut, so that he caught only a faint sound of the bump, thump of the scrubbing-brush as it accompanied Henri's high-pitched tune down the back stairs.

Without giving any warning of his arrival, he motioned the man beside the

coachman to follow with his trunk, and silently led the way up-stairs. When the trunk had been unstrapped and the man had departed, monsieur gave one slow glance all around the room. It was in perfect readiness for him. He set a match to the kindling laid in the grate, and then closed the door into the hall. The master had come home again, more silent, more mysterious in his movements than before.

Henri finished his scrubbing and his song, and, going down into the kitchen, began preparations for supper. A long time after, Jules came up from the field, put the goats in their place, and crept in behind the kitchen stove.

Then it was that Joyce, from her watch-tower of her window, saw Brossard driving home in the market-cart. "Maybe I'll have a chance to scare him while he is putting the horse up and

feeding it," she thought. It was in the dim gloaming when she could easily slip along by the hedges without attracting attention. Bareheaded, and in breathless haste to reach the barn before Brossard, she ran down the road, keeping close to the hedge, along which the wind raced also, blowing the dead leaves almost as high as her head.

Slipping through a hole in the hedge, just as Brossard drove in at the gate, she ran into the barn and crouched down behind the door. There she wrapped herself in the sheet that she had brought with her for the purpose, and proceeded to strike a match to light the lantern. The first one flickered and went out. The second did the same. Brossard was calling angrily for Jules now, and she struck another match in nervous haste, this time touching the wick with it before the wind could interfere. Then she

drew her dress over the lantern to hide the light.

"Wouldn't Jack enjoy this," she thought, with a daring little giggle that almost betrayed her hiding-place.

"I tell thee it is thy fault," cried Brossard's angry voice, drawing nearer the barn.

"But I tried," began Jules, timidly.

His trembling excuse was interrupted by Brossard, who had seized him by the arm. They were now on the threshold of the barn, which was as dark as a pocket inside.

Joyce, peeping through the crack of the door, saw the man's arm raised in the dim twilight outside. "Oh, he is really going to beat him," she thought, turning faint at the prospect. Then her indignation overcame every other feeling as she heard a heavy halter-strap whiz through the air and fall with a sickening blow

across Jules's shoulders. She had planned a scene something like this while she worked away at the lantern that afternoon. Now she felt as if she were acting a part in some private theatrical performance. Jules's cry gave her the cue, and the courage to appear.

As the second blow fell across Jules's smarting shoulders, a low, blood-curdling wail came from the dark depths of the barn. Joyce had not practised that dismal moan of a banshee to no purpose in her ghost dances at home with Jack. It rose and fell and quivered and rose again in cadences of horror. There was something awful, something inhuman, in that fiendish, long-drawn shriek.

Brossard's arm fell to his side paralyzed with fear, as that same hoarse voice cried, solemnly: "Brossard, beware! Beware!" But worse than that voice of sepulchral warning was the white-sheeted

figure, coming toward him with a wavering, ghostly motion, fire shooting from the demon-like eyes, and flaming from the hideous mouth.

Brossard sank on his knees in a shivering heap, and began crossing himself. His hair was upright with horror, and his tongue stiff. Jules knew who it was that danced around them in such giddy circles, first darting toward them with threatening gestures, and then gliding back to utter one of those awful, sickening wails. He knew that under that fiery head and wrapped in that spectral dress was his "fearless friend," who, according to promise, had hastened her aid to lend; nevertheless, he was afraid of her himself. He had never imagined that anything could look so terrifying.

The wail reached Henri's ears and aroused his curiosity. Cautiously opening the kitchen door, he thrust out his

head, and then nearly fell backward in his haste to draw it in again and slam the door. One glimpse of the ghost in the barn-yard was quite enough for Henri.

Altogether the performance probably did not last longer than a minute, but each of the sixty seconds seemed endless to Brossard. With a final die-away moan Joyce glided toward the gate, delighted beyond measure with her success; but her delight did not last long. Just as she turned the corner of the house, some one standing in the shadow of it clutched her. A strong arm was thrown around her, and a firm hand snatched the lantern, and tore the sheet away from her face.

It was Joyce's turn to be terrified. "Let me go!" she shrieked, in English. With one desperate wrench she broke away, and by the light of the grinning jack-o'-lantern saw who was her captor.

She was face to face with Monsieur Ciseaux.

"What does this mean?" he asked, severely. "Why do you come masquerading here to frighten my servants in this manner?"

For an instant Joyce stood speechless. Her boasted courage had forsaken her. It was only for an instant, however, for the rhyme that she had made seemed to sound in her ears as distinctly as if Jules were calling to her:

> "Giant scissors, fearless friend,
> Hasten, pray, thy aid to lend."

"I will be a fearless friend," she thought. Looking defiantly up into the angry face she demanded: "Then why do you keep such servants? I came because they needed to be frightened, and I'm glad you caught me, for I told Jules that I should tell you about them as soon

as you got home. Brossard has starved and beaten him like a dog ever since he has been here. I just hope that you will look at the stripes and bruises on his poor little back. He begged me not to tell, for Brossard said you would likely drive him away, as you did your brother and sister. But even if you do, the neighbours say that an orphan asylum would be a far better home for Jules than this has been. I hope you'll excuse me, monsieur, I truly do, but I'm an American, and I can't stand by and keep still when I see anybody being abused, even if I am a girl, and it isn't polite for me to talk so to older people."

Joyce fired out the words as if they had been bullets, and so rapidly that monsieur could scarcely follow her meaning. Then, having relieved her mind, and fearing that maybe she had been rude in speaking so forcibly to such an old gen-

tleman, she very humbly begged his pardon. Before he could recover from her rapid change in manner and her torrent of words, she reached out her hand, saying, in the meekest of little voices, "And will you please give me back those things, monsieur? The sheet is Madame Gréville's, and I've got to stuff that hair back in the mattress to-night."

Monsieur gave them to her, still too astonished for words. He had never before heard any child speak in such a way. This one seemed more like a wild, uncanny little sprite than like any of the little girls he had known heretofore. Before he could recover from his bewilderment, Joyce had gone. "Good night, monsieur," she called, as the gate clanged behind her.

CHAPTER VII

OLD "NUMBER THIRTY-ONE"

O sooner had the gate closed upon the subdued little ghost, shorn now of its terrors, than the old man strode forward to the place where Brossard crouched in the straw, still crossing himself. This sudden appearance of his master at such a time only added to Brossard's fright. As for Jules, his knees shook until he could scarcely stand.

Henri, his curiosity lending him courage, cautiously opened the kitchen door to peer out again. Emboldened by the

silence, he flung the door wide open, sending a broad stream of lamplight across the little group in the barn-yard. Without a word of greeting monsieur laid hold of the trembling Jules and drew him nearer the door. Throwing open the child's blouse, he examined the thin little shoulders, which shrank away as if to dodge some expected blow.

"Go to my room," was all the old man said to him. Then he turned fiercely toward Brossard. His angry tones reached Jules even after he had mounted the stairs and closed the door. The child crept close to the cheerful fire, and, crouching down on the rug, waited in a shiver of nervousness for his uncle's step on the stair.

Meanwhile, Joyce, hurrying home all a-tingle with the excitement of her adventure, wondered anxiously what would be the result of it. Under cover of the

dusk she slipped into the house unobserved. There was barely time to dress for dinner. When she made her appearance monsieur complimented her unusually red cheeks.

"Doubtless mademoiselle has had a fine promenade," he said.

"No," answered Joyce, with a blush that made them redder still, and that caused madame to look at her so keenly that she felt those sharp eyes must be reading her inmost thoughts. It disturbed her so that she upset the salt, spilled a glass of water, and started to eat her soup with a fork. She glanced in an embarrassed way from madame to monsieur, and gave a nervous little laugh.

"The little mademoiselle has been in mischief again," remarked monsieur, with a smile. "What is it this time?"

The smile was so encouraging that Joyce's determination not to tell melted

away, and she began a laughable account of the afternoon's adventure. At first both the old people looked shocked. Monsieur shrugged his shoulders and pulled his gray beard thoughtfully. Madame threw up her hands at the end of each sentence like horrified little exclamation points. But when Joyce had told the entire story neither of them had a word of blame, because their sympathies were so thoroughly aroused for Jules.

"I shall ask Monsieur Ciseaux to allow the child to visit here sometimes," said madame, her kind old heart full of pity for the motherless little fellow; "and I shall also explain that it was only your desire to save Jules from ill-treatment that caused you to do such an unusual thing. Otherwise he might think you too bold and too — well, peculiar, to be a fit playmate for his little nephew."

"Oh, was it really so improper and

horrid of me, madame?" asked Joyce, anxiously.

Madame hesitated. "The circumstances were some excuse," she finally admitted. "But I certainly should not want a little daughter of mine to be out after dark by herself on such a wild errand. In this country a little girl would not think it possible to do such a thing."

Joyce's face was very sober as she arose to leave the room. "I do wish that I could be proper like little French girls," she said, with a sigh.

Madame drew her toward her, kissing her on both cheeks. It was such an unusual thing for madame to do that Joyce could scarcely help showing some surprise. Feeling that the caress was an assurance that she was not in disgrace, as she had feared, she ran up-stairs, so light-hearted that she sang on the way.

As the door closed behind her, mon-

sieur reached for his pipe, saying, as he did so, "She has a heart of gold, the little mademoiselle."

"Yes," assented madame; "but she is a strange little body, so untamed and original. I am glad that her cousin returns soon, for the responsibility is too great for my old shoulders. One never knows what she will do next."

Perhaps it was for this reason that madame took Joyce with her when she went to Tours next day. She felt safer when the child was in her sight.

"It is so much nicer going around with you than Marie," said Joyce, giving madame an affectionate little pat, as they stood before the entrance of a great square building, awaiting admission. "You take me to places that I have never seen before. What place is this?" She stooped to read the inscription on the door-plate:

"Little Sisters of the Poor."

Before her question could be answered, the door was opened by a wrinkled old woman, in a nodding white cap, who led them into a reception-room at the end of the hall.

"Ask for Sister Denisa," said madame, "and give her my name."

The old woman shuffled out of the room, and madame, taking a small memorandum-book from her pocket, began to study it. Joyce sat looking about her with sharp, curious glances. She wondered if these little sisters of the poor were barefoot beggar girls, who went about the streets with ragged shawls over their heads, and with baskets in their hands. In her lively imagination she pictured row after row of such unfortunate children, marching out in the morning, empty-handed, and creeping back at night

with the results of the day's begging. She did not like to ask about them, however, and, in a few minutes, her curiosity was satisfied without the use of questions.

Sister Denisa entered the room. She was a beautiful woman, in the plain black habit and white head-dress of a sister of charity.

"Oh, they're nuns!" exclaimed Joyce, in a disappointed whisper. She had been hoping to see the beggar girls. She had often passed the convent in St. Symphorien, and caught glimpses of the nuns through the high barred gate. She had wondered how it must feel to be shut away from the world; to see only the patient white faces of the other sisters, and to walk with meekly folded hands and downcast eyes always in the same old paths.

But Sister Denisa was different from

the nuns that she had seen before. Some inward joy seemed to shine through her beautiful face and make it radiant. She laughed often, and there was a happy twinkle in her clear, gray eyes. When she came into the room, she seemed to bring the outdoors with her, there was such sunshine and fresh air in the cheeriness of her greeting.

Madame had come to visit an old pensioner of hers who was in the home. After a short conversation, Sister Denisa rose to lead the way to her. "Would the little mademoiselle like to go through the house, while madame is engaged?" asked the nun.

"Oh, yes, thank you," answered Joyce, who had found by this time that this home was not for little beggar girls, but for old men and women. Joyce had known very few old people in her short life, except her Grandmother Ware; and

this grandmother was one of those dear, sunny old souls, whom everybody loves to claim, whether they are in the family or not. Some of Joyce's happiest days had been spent in her grandmother's country home, and the host of happy memories that she had stored up during those visits served to sweeten all her after life.

Old age, to Joyce, was associated with the most beautiful things that she had ever known: the warmest hospitality, the tenderest love, the cheeriest home-life. Strangers were in the old place now, and Grandmother Ware was no longer living, but, for her sake, Joyce held sacred every wrinkled face set round with snow-white hair, just as she looked tenderly on all old-fashioned flowers, because she had seen them first in her grandmother's garden.

Sister Denisa led the way into a large,

sunny room, and Joyce looked around eagerly. It was crowded with old men. Some were sitting idly on the benches around the walls, or dozing in chairs near the stove. Some smoked, some gathered around the tables where games of checkers and chess were going on; some gazed listlessly out of the windows. It was good to see how dull faces brightened, as Sister Denisa passed by with a smile for this group, a cheery word for the next. She stopped to brush the hair back from the forehead of an old paralytic, and pushed another man gently aside, when he blocked the way, with such a sweet-voiced " Pardon, little father," that it was like a caress. One white-haired old fellow, in his second childhood, reached out and caught at her dress, as she passed by.

Crossing a porch where were more old men sitting sadly alone, or walking sociably up and down in the sunshine, Sis-

ter Denisa passed along a court and held the door open for Joyce to enter another large room.

"Here is the rest of our family," she said. "A large one, is it not? Two hundred poor old people that nobody wants, and nobody cares what becomes of."

Joyce looked around the room and saw on every hand old age that had nothing beautiful, nothing attractive. "Were they beggars when they were little?" she asked.

"No, indeed," answered the nun. "That is the saddest part of it to me. Nearly all these poor creatures you see here once had happy homes of their own. That pitiful old body over by the stove, shaking with palsy, was once a gay, rich countess; the invalid whom madame visits was a marquise. It would break your heart, mademoiselle, to hear the stories of some of these people, especially those

who have been cast aside by ungrateful children, to whom their support has become a burden. Several of these women have prosperous grandchildren, to whom we have appealed in vain. There is no cruelty that hurts me like such cruelty to old age."

Just then another nun came into the room, said something to Sister Denisa in a low voice, and glided out like a silent shadow, her rosary swaying back and forth with every movement of her clinging black skirts. "I am needed upstairs," said Sister Denisa, turning to Joyce. "Will you come up and see the sleeping-rooms?"

They went up the freshly scrubbed steps to a great dormitory, where, against the bare walls, stood long rows of narrow cots. They were all empty, except one at the farthest end, where an old woman lay with her handkerchief across her eyes.

"Poor old Number Thirty-one!" said Sister Denisa. "She seems to feel her unhappy position more than any one in the house. The most of them are thankful for mere bodily comfort, — satisfied with food and shelter and warmth; but she is continually pining for her old home surroundings. Will you not come and speak to her in English? She married a countryman of yours, and lived over thirty years in America. She speaks of that time as the happiest in her life. I am sure that you can give her a great deal of pleasure."

"Is she ill?" said Joyce, timidly drawing back as the nun started across the room.

"No, I think not," was the answer. "She says she can't bear to be herded in one room with all those poor creatures, like a flock of sheep, with nothing to do but wait for death. She has always been

accustomed to having a room of her own, so that her greatest trial is in having no privacy. She must eat, sleep, and live with a hundred other old women always around her. She comes up here to bed whenever she can find the slightest ache for an excuse, just to be by herself. I wish that we could give her a little spot that she could call her own, and shut the door on, and feel alone. But it cannot be," she added, with a sigh. "It taxes our strength to the utmost to give them all even a bare home."

By this time they had reached the cot, over the head of which hung a card, bearing the number "Thirty-one."

"Here is a little friend to see you, grandmother," said Sister Denisa, placing a chair by the bedside, and stooping to smooth back the locks of silvery hair that had strayed out from under the coarse white nightcap. Then she passed

quickly on to her other duties, leaving Joyce to begin the conversation as best she could. The old woman looked at her sharply with piercing dark eyes, which must have been beautiful in their youth. The intense gaze embarrassed Joyce, and to break the silence she hurriedly stammered out the first thing that came to her mind.

"Are you ill to-day?"

The simple question had a startling effect on the old woman. She raised herself on one elbow, and reached out for Joyce's hand, drawing her eagerly nearer. "Ah," she cried, "you speak the language that my husband taught me to love, and the tongue my little children lisped; but they are all dead now, and I've come back to my native land to find no home but the one that charity provides."

Her words ended in a wail, and she

sank back on her pillow. "And this is my birthday," she went on. "Seventy-three years old, and a pauper, cast out to the care of strangers."

The tears ran down her wrinkled cheeks, and her mouth trembled pitifully. Joyce was distressed; she looked around for Sister Denisa, but saw that they were alone, they two, in the great bare dormitory, with its long rows of narrow white cots. The child felt utterly helpless to speak a word of comfort, although she was so sorry for the poor lonely old creature that she began to cry softly to herself. She leaned over, and taking one of the thin, blue-veined hands in hers, patted it tenderly with her plump little fingers.

"I ought not to complain," said the trembling voice, still broken by sobs. "We have food and shelter and sunshine and the sisters. Ah, that little Sister Denisa, she is indeed a smile of God to us

all. But at seventy-three one wants more than a cup of coffee and a clean handkerchief. One wants something besides a bed and being just Number Thirty-one among two hundred other paupers."

"I am so sorry!" exclaimed Joyce, with such heartfelt earnestness that the sobbing woman felt the warmth of her sympathy, and looked up with a brighter face.

"Talk to me," she exclaimed. "It has been so long since I have heard your language."

While she obeyed Joyce kept thinking of her Grandmother Ware. She could see her outdoors among her flowers, the dahlias and touch-me-nots, the four-o'clocks and the cinnamon roses, taking such pride and pleasure in her sweet posy beds. She could see her beside the little table on the shady porch, making tea for some old neighbour who had dropped in

to spend the afternoon with her. Or she was asleep in her armchair by the western window, her Bible in her lap and a smile on her sweet, kindly face. How dreary and empty the days must seem to poor old Number Thirty-one, with none of these things to brighten them.

Joyce could scarcely keep the tears out of her voice while she talked. Later, when Sister Denisa came back, Joyce was softly humming a lullaby, and Number Thirty-one, with a smile on her pitiful old face, was sleeping like a little child.

"You will come again, dear mademoiselle," said Sister Denisa, as she kissed the child good-bye at the door. "You have brought a blessing, may you carry one away as well!"

Joyce looked inquiringly at madame. "You may come whenever you like," was the answer. "Marie can bring you whenever you are in town."

Joyce was so quiet on the way home that madame feared the day had been too fatiguing for her. "No," said Joyce, soberly. "I was only thinking about poor old Number Thirty-one. I am sorrier for her than I was for Jules. I used to think that there was nothing so sad as being a little child without any father or mother, and having to live in an asylum. I've often thought how lovely it would be to go around and find a beautiful home for every little orphan in the world. But I believe, now, that it is worse to be old that way. Old people can't play together, and they haven't anything to look forward to, and it makes them so miserable to remember all the things they have had and lost. If I had enough money to adopt anybody, I would adopt some poor old grandfather or grandmother and make'm happy all the rest of their days."

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTMAS PLANS AND AN ACCIDENT

THAT night, when Marie came in to light the lamps and brush Joyce's hair before dinner, she had some news to tell.

"Brossard has been sent away from the Ciseaux place," she said. "A new man is coming to-morrow, and my friend, Clotilde Robard, has already taken the position of housekeeper. She says that a very different life has begun for little Monsieur Jules, and that in his fine new clothes one could never recognize the little goatherd. He looks

now like what he is, a gentleman's son. He has the room next to monsieur's, all freshly furnished, and after New Year a tutor is coming from Paris.

"But they say that it is pitiful to see how greatly the child fears his uncle. He does not understand the old man's cold, forbidding manner, and it provokes monsieur to have the little one tremble and grow pale whenever he speaks. Clotilde says that Madame Gréville told monsieur that the boy needed games and young companions to make him more like other children, and he promised her that Monsieur Jules should come over here to-morrow afternoon to play with you."

"Oh, good!" cried Joyce. "We'll have another barbecue if the day is fine. I am so glad that we do not have to be bothered any more by those tiresome old goats."

By the time the next afternoon arrived, however, Joyce was far too much interested in something else to think of a barbecue. Cousin Kate had come back from Paris with a trunk full of pretty things, and a plan for the coming Christmas. At first she thought of taking only madame into her confidence, and preparing a small Christmas tree for Joyce; but afterward she concluded that it would give the child more pleasure if she were allowed to take part in the preparations. It would keep her from being homesick by giving her something else to think about.

Then madame proposed inviting a few of the little peasant children who had never seen a Christmas tree. The more they discussed the plan the larger it grew, like a rolling snowball. By lunch-time madame had a list of thirty children, who were to be bidden to the Noël fête and

Cousin Kate had decided to order a tree tall enough to touch the ceiling.

When Jules came over, awkward and shy with the consciousness of his new clothes, he found Joyce sitting in the midst of yards of gaily coloured tarletan. It was heaped up around her in bright masses of purple and orange and scarlet and green, and she was making it into candy-bags for the tree.

In a few minutes Jules had forgotten all about himself, and was as busy as she, pinning the little stocking-shaped patterns in place, and carefully cutting out those fascinating bags.

"You would be lots of help," said Joyce, "if you could come over every day, for there's all the ornaments to unpack, and the corn to shell, and pop, and string. It will take most of my time to dress the dolls, and there's such a short time to do everything in."

"You never saw any pop-corn, did you, Jules?" asked Cousin Kate. "When I was here last time, I couldn't find it anywhere in France; but the other day a friend told me of a grocer in Paris, who imports it for his American customers every winter. So I went there. Joyce suppose you get the popper and show Jules what the corn is like."

Madame was interested also, as she watched the little brown kernels shaken back and forth in their wire cage over the glowing coals. When they began popping open, the little seeds suddenly turning into big white blossoms, she sent Rosalie running to bring monsieur to see the novel sight.

"We can eat and work at the same time," said Joyce, as she filled a dish with the corn, and called Jules back to the table, where he had been cutting tarletan. "There's no time to lose. See what a

funny grain this is!" she cried, picking up one that lay on the top of the dish. "It looks like Therese, the fishwoman, in her white cap."

"And here is a goat's head," said Jules, picking up another grain. "And this one looks like a fat pigeon."

He had forgotten his shyness entirely now, and was laughing and talking as easily as Jack could have done.

"Jules," said Joyce, suddenly, looking around to see that the older people were too busy with their own conversation to notice hers. "Jules, why don't you talk to your Uncle Martin the way you do to me? He would like you lots better if you would. Robard says that you get pale and frightened every time he speaks to you, and it provokes him for you to be so timid."

Jules dropped his eyes. "I cannot help it," he exclaimed. "He looks so grim

and cross that my voice just won't come out of my throat when I open my mouth."

Joyce studied him critically, with her head tipped a little to one side. "Well, I must say," she exclaimed, finally, "that, for a boy born in America, you have the least dare about you of anybody I ever saw. Your Uncle Martin isn't any grimmer or crosser than a man I know at home. There's Judge Ward, so big and solemn and dignified that everybody is half-way afraid of him. Even grown people have always been particular about what they said to him.

"Last summer his little nephew, Charley Ward, came to visit him. Charley's just a little thing, still in dresses, and he calls his uncle, Bill. Think of anybody daring to call Judge Ward, Bill! No matter what the judge was doing, or how glum he looked, if Charley took a notion,

he would go up and stand in front of him, and say, 'Laugh, Bill, laugh!' If the judge happened to be reading, he'd have to put down his book, and no matter whether he felt funny or not, or whether there was anything to laugh at or not, he would have to throw his head back and just roar. Charley like to see his fat sides shake, and his white teeth shine. I've heard people say that the judge likes Charley better than anybody else in the world, because he's the only person who acts as if he wasn't afraid of him."

Jules sat still a minute, considering, and then asked, anxiously, "But what do you suppose would happen if I should say, 'Laugh, Martin, laugh,' to my uncle?"

Joyce shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "Mercy, Jules, I did not mean that you should act like a three-year-old baby. I meant that you ought to

talk up to your uncle some. Now this is the way you are." She picked up a kernel of the unpopped corn, and held it out for him to see. "You shut yourself up in a little hard ball like this, so that your uncle can't get acquainted with you. How can he know what is inside of your head if you always shut up like a clam whenever he comes near you? This is the way that you ought to be." She shot one of the great white grains toward him with a deft flip of her thumb and finger. "Be free and open with him."

Jules put the tender morsel in his mouth and ate it thoughtfully. "I'll try," he promised, "if you really think that it would please him, and I can think of anything to say. You don't know how I dread going to the table when everything is always so still that we can hear the clock tick."

"Well, you take my advice," said

Joyce. "Talk about anything. Tell him about our Thanksgiving feast and the Christmas tree, and ask him if you can't come over every day to help. I wouldn't let anybody think that I was a coward."

Joyce's little lecture had a good effect, and monsieur saw the wisdom of Madame Gréville's advice when Jules came to the table that night. He had brought a handful of the wonderful corn to show his uncle, and in the conversation that it brought about he unconsciously showed something else, — something of his sensitive inner self that aroused his uncle's interest.

Every afternoon of the week that followed found Jules hurrying over to Madame Gréville's to help with the Christmas preparations. He strung yards of corn, and measured out the nuts and candy for each of the gay bags. Twice he went in the carriage to Tours with

Cousin Kate and Joyce, to help buy presents for the thirty little guests. He was jostled by the holiday shoppers in crowded aisles. He stood enraptured in front of wonderful show-windows, and he had the joy of choosing fifteen things from piles of bright tin trumpets, drums, jumping-jacks, and picture-books. Joyce chose the presents for the girls.

The tree was bought and set up in a large unused room back of the library, and as soon as each article was in readiness it was carried in and laid on a table beside it. Jules used to steal in sometimes and look at the tapers, the beautiful coloured glass balls, the gilt stars and glittering tinsel, and wonder how the stately cedar would look in all that array of loveliness. Everything belonging to it seemed sacred, even the unused scraps of bright tarletan and the bits of broken candles. He would not let Marie sweep

them up to be burned, but gathered them carefully into a box and carried them home. There were several things that he had rescued from her broom, — one of those beautiful red balls, cracked on one side it is true, but gleaming like a mammoth red cherry on the other. There were scraps of tinsel and odds and ends of ornaments that had been broken or damaged by careless handling. These he hid away in a chest in his room, as carefully as a miser would have hoarded a bag of gold.

Clotilde Robard, the housekeeper, wondered why she found his candle burned so low several mornings. She would have wondered still more if she had gone into his room awhile before daybreak. He had awakened early, and, sitting up in bed with the quilts wrapped around him, spread the scraps of tarletan on his knees. He was piecing together with his awk-

ward little fingers enough to make several tiny bags.

Henri missed his spade one morning, and hunted for it until he was out of patience. It was nowhere to be seen. Half an hour later, coming back to the house, he found it hanging in its usual place, where he had looked for it a dozen times at least. Jules had taken it down to the woods to dig up a little cedar-tree, so little that it was not over a foot high when it was planted in a box.

Clotilde had to be taken into the secret, for he could not hide it from her. "It is for my Uncle Martin," he said, timidly. "Do you think he will like it?"

The motherly housekeeper looked at the poor little tree, decked out in its scraps of cast-off finery, and felt a sob rising in her throat, but she held up her hands with many admiring exclamations that made Jules glow with pride.

"I have no beautiful white strings of pop-corn to hang over it like wreaths of snow," he said, "so I am going down the lane for some mistletoe that grows in one of the highest trees. The berries are like lovely white wax beads."

"You are a good little lad," said the housekeeper, kindly, as she gave his head an affectionate pat. "I shall have to make something to hang on that tree myself; some gingerbread figures, maybe. I used to know how to cut out men and horses and pigs, — nearly all the animals. I must try it again some day soon."

A happy smile spread all over Jules's face as he thanked her. The words, "You are a good little lad," sent a warm glow of pleasure through him, and rang like music in his ears all the way down the lane. How bright the world looked this frosty December morning! What cheeriness there was in the ring of

Henri's axe as he chopped away at the stove-wood! What friendliness in the baker's whistle, as he rattled by in his big cart! Jules found himself whistling, too, for sheer gladness, and all because of no more kindness than might have been thrown to a dog; a pat on the head and the words, "You are a good little lad."

Sometime after, it may have been two hours or more, Madame Gréville was startled by a wild, continuous ringing of the bell at her front gate. Somebody was sending peal after peal echoing through the garden, with quick, impatient jerks of the bell-wire. She hurried out herself to answer the summons.

Berthé had already shot back the bolt and showed Clotilde leaning against the stone post, holding her fat sides and completely exhausted by her short run from the Ciseaux house.

"Will madame send Gabriel for the doctor?" she cried, gasping for breath at every word. "The little Monsieur Jules has fallen from a tree and is badly hurt. We do not know how much, for he is still unconscious and his uncle is away from home. Henri found him lying under a tree with a big bunch of mistletoe in his arms. He carried him up-stairs while I ran over to ask you to send Gabriel quickly on a horse for the doctor."

"Gabriel shall go immediately," said Madame Gréville, "and I shall follow you as soon as I have given the order."

Clotilde started back in as great haste as her weight would allow, puffing and blowing and wiping her eyes on her apron at every step. Madame overtook her before she had gone many rods. Always calm and self-possessed in every emergency, madame took command now; sent the weeping Clotilde to look for old linen,

Henri to the village for Monsieur Ciseaux, and then turned her attention to Jules.

"To think," said Clotilde, coming into the room, "that the last thing the poor little lamb did was to show me his Christmas tree that he was making ready for his uncle!" She pointed to the corner where it stood, decked by awkward boyish hands in its pitiful collection of scraps.

"Poor little fellow!" said madame, with tears in her own eyes. "He has done the best he could. Put it in the closet, Clotilde. Jules would not want it to be seen before Christmas."

Madame stayed until the doctor had made his visit; then the report that she carried home was that Jules had regained consciousness, and that, as far as could be discovered, his only injury was a broken leg.

Joyce took refuge in the pear-tree. It

was not alone because Jules was hurt that she wanted to cry, but because they must have the Noël fête without him. She knew how bitterly he would be disappointed.

CHAPTER IX

A GREAT DISCOVERY

NLY two more nights till Christmas eve, two more nights, two more nights," sang Joyce to Jules in a sort of chant. She was sitting beside his bed with a box in her lap, full of little dolls, which she was dressing. Every day since his accident she had been allowed to make him two visits, — one in the morning, and one in the afternoon. They helped wonderfully in shortening the long, tedious days for Jules. True, Madame Gréville came often with broths and jellies,

Cousin Kate made flying visits to leave rare hothouse grapes and big bunches of violets; Clotilde hung over him with motherly tenderness, and his uncle looked into the room many times a day to see that he wanted nothing.

Jules's famished little heart drank in all this unusual kindness and attention as greedily as the parched earth drinks in the rain. Still, he would have passed many a long, restless hour, had it not been for Joyce's visits.

She brought over a photograph of the house at home, with the family seated in a group on the front porch. Jules held it close while she introduced each one of them. By the time he had heard all about Holland's getting lost the day the circus came to town, and Jack's taking the prize in a skating contest, and Mary's setting her apron on fire, and the baby's sweet little ways when he said his pray-

ers, or played peek-a-boo, he felt very well acquainted with the entire Ware family. Afterward, when Joyce had gone, he felt his loneliness more than ever. He lay there, trying to imagine how it must feel to have a mother and sisters and brothers all as fond of each other as Joyce's were, and to live in the midst of such good times as always went on in the little brown house.

Monsieur Ciseaux, sitting by his fire with the door open between the two rooms, listened to Joyce's merry chatter with almost as much interest as Jules. He would have been ashamed to admit how eagerly he listened for her step on the stairs every day, or what longings wakened in his lonely old heart, when he sat by his loveless fireside after she had gone home, and there was no more sound of children's voices in the next room.

There had been good times in the old

Ciseaux house also, once, and two little brothers and a sister had played in that very room; but they had grown up long ago, and the ogre of selfishness and misunderstanding had stolen in and killed all their happiness. Ah, well, there was much that the world would never know about that misunderstanding. There was much to forgive and forget on both sides.

Joyce had a different story for each visit. To-day she had just finished telling Jules the fairy-tale of which he never tired, the tale of the giant scissors.

"I never look at those scissors over the gate without thinking of you," said Jules, "and the night when you played that I was the Prince, and you came to rescue me."

"I wish I could play scissors again, and rescue somebody else that I know," answered Joyce. "I'd take poor old

Number Thirty-one away from the home of the Little Sisters of the Poor."

"What's Number Thirty-one?" asked Jules. "You never told me about that."

"Didn't I?" asked Joyce, in surprise. "She is a lonely old woman that the sisters take care of. I have talked about her so often, and written home so much, that I thought I had told everybody. I can hardly keep from crying whenever I think of her. Marie and I stop every day we go into town and take her flowers. I have been there four times since my first visit with madame. Sometimes she tells me things that happened when she was a little girl here in France, but she talks to me oftenest in English about the time when she lived in America. I can hardly imagine that she was ever as young as I am, and that she romped with her brothers as I did with Jack."

"Tell some of the things that she told

you," urged Jules; so Joyce began repeating all that she knew about Number Thirty-one.

It was a pathetic little tale that brought tears to Jules's eyes, and a dull pain to the heart of the old man who listened in the next room. "I wish I were rich," exclaimed Joyce, impulsively, as she finished. "I wish I had a beautiful big home, and I would adopt her for my grandmother. She should have a great lovely room, where the sun shines in all day long, and it should be furnished in rose-colour like the one that she had when she was a girl. I'd dress her in gray satin and soft white lace. She has the prettiest silvery hair, and beautiful dark eyes. She would make a lovely grandmother. And I would have a maid to wait on her, and there'd be mignonette always growing in boxes on the window-sill. Every time I came back from town, I'd bring

her a present just for a nice litle surprise; and I'd read to her, and sing to her, and make her feel that she belonged to somebody, so that she'd be happy all the rest of her days.

"Yesterday while I was there she was holding a little cut-glass vinaigrette. It had a big D engraved on the silver top. She said that it was the only thing that she had left except her wedding-ring, and that it was to be Sister Denisa's when she was gone. The D stands for both their names. Hers is Désiré. She said the vinaigrette was too precious to part with as long as she lives, because her oldest brother gave it to her on her twelfth birthday, when she was exactly as old as I am. Isn't Désiré a pretty name?"

"Mademoiselle," called Monsieur Ciseaux from the next room, "mademoiselle, will you come — will you tell me

"'There she is! That's Number Thirty-one, her very own self'"

— what name was that? Désiré, did you say?"

There was something so strange in the way he called that name Désiré, almost like a cry, that Joyce sprang up, startled, and ran into the next room. She had never ventured inside before.

"Tell me again what you were telling Jules," said the old man. "Seventy-three years, did you say? And how long has she been back in France?"

Joyce began to answer his rapid questions, but stopped with a frightened cry as her glance fell on a large portrait hanging over the mantel. "There she is!" she cried, excitedly dancing up and down as she pointed to the portrait. "There she is! That's Number Thirty-one, her very own self."

"You are mistaken!" cried the old man, attempting to rise from his chair, but trembling so that he could scarcely

pull himself up on his feet. "That is a picture of my mother, and Désiré is dead; long dead."

"But it is exactly like Number Thirty-one, — I mean Madame Désiré," persisted Joyce.

Monsieur looked at her wildly from under his shaggy brows, and then, turning away, began to pace up and down the room. "I had a sister once," he began. "She would have been seventy-three this month, and her name was Désiré."

Joyce stood motionless in the middle of the room, wondering what was coming next. Suddenly turning with a violence that made her start, he cried, "No, I never can forgive! She has been dead to me nearly a lifetime. Why did you tell me this, child? Out of my sight! What is it to me if she is homeless and alone? Go! Go!"

He waved his hands so wildly in mo-

tioning her away, that Joyce ran out of the room and banged the door behind her.

"What do you suppose is the matter with him?" asked Jules, in a frightened whisper, as they listened to his heavy tread, back and forth, back and forth, in the next room.

Joyce shook her head. "I don't know for sure," she answered, hesitatingly, "but I believe that he is going crazy."

Jules's eyes opened so wide that Joyce wished she had not frightened him. "Oh, you know that I didn't mean it," she said, reassuringly. The heavy tread stopped, and the children looked at each other.

"What can he be doing now?" Jules asked, anxiously.

Joyce tiptoed across the room, and peeped through the keyhole. "He is sitting down now, by the table, with his head on his arms. He looks as if he might be crying about something."

"I wish he didn't feel bad," said Jules, with a swift rush of pity. "He has been so good to me ever since he sent Brossard away. Sometimes I think that he must feel as much alone in the world as I do, because all his family are dead, too. Before I broke my leg I was making him a little Christmas tree, so that he need not feel left out when we had the big one. I was getting mistletoe for it when I fell. I can't finish it now, but there's five pieces of candle on it, and I'll get Clotilde to light them while the fête is going on, so that I'll not miss the big tree so much. Oh, nobody knows how much I want to go to that fête! Sometimes it seems more than I can bear to have to stay away."

"Where is your tree?" asked Joyce. "May I see it?"

Jules pointed to the closet. "It's in there," he said, proudly. "I trimmed it

with pieces that Marie swept up to burn. Oh, shut the door! Quick!" he cried, excitedly, as a step was heard in the hall. "I don't want anybody to see it before the time comes."

The step was Henri's. He had come to say that Marie was waiting to take mademoiselle home. Joyce was glad of the interruption. She could not say anything in praise of the poor little tree, and she knew that Jules expected her to. She felt relieved that Henri's presence made it impossible for her to express any opinion.

She bade Jules good-bye gaily, but went home with such a sober little face that Cousin Kate began to question her about her visit. Madame, sitting by the window with her embroidery-frame, heard the account also. Several times she looked significantly across at Cousin Kate, over the child's head.

"Joyce," said Cousin Kate, "you have had so little outdoor exercise since Jules's accident that it would be a good thing for you to run around in the garden awhile before dark."

Joyce had not seen madame's glances, but she felt vaguely that Cousin Kate was making an excuse to get rid of her. She was disappointed, for she thought that her account of monsieur's queer actions and Jules's little tree would have made a greater impression on her audience. She went out obediently, walking up and down the paths with her hands in her jacket pockets, and her red tam-o'shanter pulled down over her eyes. The big white cat followed her, ran on ahead, and then stopped, arching its back as if waiting for her to stroke it. Taking no notice of it, Joyce turned aside to the pear-tree, and climbed up among the highest branches.

The cat rubbed against the tree, mewing and purring by turns, then sprang up in the tree after her. She took the warm, furry creature in her arms and began talking to it.

"Oh, Solomon," she said, "what do you suppose is the matter over there? My poor old lady must be monsieur's sister, or she couldn't have looked exactly like that picture, and he would not have acted so queerly. What do you suppose it is that he can never forgive? Why did he call me in there and then drive me out in such a crazy way, and tramp around the room, and put his head down on his arms as if he were crying?"

Solomon purred louder and closed his eyes.

"Oh, you dear, comfortable old thing," exclaimed Joyce, giving the cat a shake. "Wake up and take some interest in what I am saying. I wish you were as smart

as Puss in Boots; then maybe you could find out what is the matter. How I wish fairy-tales could be true! I'd say 'Giant scissors, right the wrong and open the gate that's been shut so long.' There! Did you hear that, Solomon Gréville? I said a rhyme right off without waiting to make it up. Then the scissors would leap down and cut the misunderstanding or trouble or whatever it is, and the gate would fly open, and there the brother and sister would meet each other. All the unhappy years would be forgotten, and they'd take each other by the hand, just as they did when they were little children, Martin and Désiré, and go into the old home together, — on Christmas Day, in the morning."

Joyce was half-singing her words now, as she rocked the cat back and forth in her arms. "And then the scissors would bring Jules a magnificent big tree, and

he'd never be afraid of his uncle any more. Oh, they'd all have such a happy time on Christmas Day, in the morning!"

Joyce had fully expected to be homesick all during the holidays; but now she was so absorbed in other people's troubles, and her day-dreams to make every body happy, that she forgot all about herself. She fairly bubbled over with the peace and good-will of the approaching Christmas-tide, and rocked the cat back and forth in the pear-tree to the tune of a happy old-time carol.

A star or two twinkled out through the gloaming, and, looking up beyond them through the infinite stretches of space, Joyce thought of a verse that she and Jack had once learned together, one rainy Sunday at her Grandmother Ware's, sitting on a little stool at the old lady's feet:

"Behold thou hast made the heaven

and the earth by thy great power and outstretched arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee." Her heart gave a bound at the thought. Why should she be sitting there longing for fairy-tales to be true, when the great Hand that had set the stars to swinging could bring anything to pass; could even open that long-closed gate and bring the brother and sister together again, and send happiness to little Jules?

Joyce lifted her eyes again and looked up, out past the stars. "Oh, if you please, God," she whispered, "for the little Christ-child's sake."

When Joyce went back to the house, Cousin Kate sat in the drawing-room alone. Madame had gone over to see Jules, and did not return until long after dark. Berthé had been in three times to ask monsieur if dinner should be served, before they heard her ring at the gate.

When she finally came, there was such an air of mystery about her that Joyce was puzzled. All that next morning, too, the day before Christmas, it seemed to Joyce as if something unusual were afloat. Everybody in the house was acting strangely.

Madame and Cousin Kate did not come home to lunch. She had been told that she must not go to see Jules until afternoon, and the doors of the room where the Christmas tree was kept had all been carefully locked. She thought that the morning never would pass. It was nearly three o'clock when she started over to see Jules. To her great surprise, as she ran lightly up the stairs to his room, she saw her Cousin Kate hurrying across the upper hall, with a pile of rose-coloured silk curtains in her arms.

Jules tried to raise himself up in bed as Joyce entered, forgetting all about his

broken leg in his eagerness to tell the news. "Oh, what do you think!" he cried. "They said that I might be the one to tell you. She is Uncle Martin's sister, the old woman you told about yesterday, and he is going to bring her home to-morrow."

Joyce sank into a chair with a little gasp at the suddenness of his news. She had not expected this beautiful ending of her day-dreams to be brought about so soon, although she had hoped that it would be sometime.

"How did it all happen?" she cried, with a beaming face. "Tell me about it! Quick!"

"Yesterday afternoon madame came over soon after you left. She gave me my wine jelly, and then went into Uncle Martin's room, and talked and talked for the longest time. After she had gone he did not eat any dinner, and I think that

he must have sat up all night, for I heard him walking around every time that I waked up. Very early this morning, madame came back again, and M. Gréville was with her. They drove with Uncle Martin to the Little Sisters of the Poor. I don't know what happened out there, only that Aunt Désiré is to be brought home to-morrow.

"Your Cousin Kate was with them when they came back, and they had brought all sorts of things with them from Tours. She is in there now, making Aunt Désiré's room look like it did when she was a girl."

"Oh, isn't it lovely!" exclaimed Joyce. "It is better than all the fairy-tales that I have ever read or heard, — almost too good to be true!" Just then Cousin Kate called her, and she ran across the hall. Standing in the doorway, she looked all around the freshly furnished room, that

glowed with the same soft, warm pink that colours the heart of a shell.

"How beautiful!" cried Joyce, glancing from the rose on the dressing-table to the soft curtains of the windows, which all opened toward the morning sun. "What a change it will be from that big bare dormitory with its rows of narrow little cots." She tiptoed around the room, admiring everything, and smiling over the happiness in store for poor old Number Thirty-one, when she should find herself in the midst of such loveliness.

Joyce's cup of pleasure was so full, that it brimmed over when they turned to leave the room. Cousin Kate slipped an arm around her, and kissed her softly on the forehead.

"You dear little fairy-tale lover," she said. "Do you know that it is because of you that this desert has blossomed? If you had never made all those visits to

the Little Sisters of the Poor, and had never won old Madame Désiré's love and confidence by your sympathy, if you had never told Jules the story of the giant scissors, and wished so loud that you could fly to her rescue, old monsieur would never have known that his sister is living. Even then, I doubt if he would have taken this step, and brought her back home to live, if your stories of your mother and the children had not brought his own childhood back to him. He said that he used to sit there hour after hour, and hear you talk of your life at home, until some of its warmth and love crept into his own frozen old heart, and thawed out its selfishness and pride."

Joyce lifted her radiant face, and looked toward the half-opened window, as she caught the sound of chimes. Across the Loire came the deep-toned voice of a cathedral bell, ringing for vespers.

"Listen!" she cried. "Peace on earth, — good-will — oh, Cousin Kate! It really does seem to say it! My Christmas has begun the day before."

CHAPTER X

CHRISTMAS

ONG before the Christmas dawn was bright enough to bring the blue parrots into plain view on the walls of Joyce's room, she had climbed out of bed to look for her " messages from Noël." The night before, following the old French custom, she had set her little slippers just outside the threshold. Now, candle in hand, she softly slipped to the door and peeped out into the hall. Her first eager glance showed that they were full.

Climbing back into her warm bed, she

put the candle on the table beside it, and began emptying the slippers. They were filled with bonbons and all sorts of little trifles, such as she and Jules had admired in the gay shop windows. On the top of one madame had laid a slender silver pencil, and monsieur a pretty purse. In the other was a pair of little wooden shoes, fashioned like the ones that Jules had worn when she first knew him. They were only half as long as her thumb, and wrapped in a paper on which was written that Jules himself had whittled them out for her, with Henri's help and instructions.

"What little darlings!" exclaimed Joyce. "I hope he will think as much of the scrap-book that I made for him as I do of these. I know that he will be pleased with the big microscope that Cousin Kate bought for him."

She spread all the things out on the

table, and gave the slippers a final shake. A red morocco case, no larger than half a dollar, fell out of the toe of one of them. Inside the case was a tiny buttonhole watch, with its wee hands pointing to six o'clock. It was the smallest watch that Joyce had ever seen, Cousin Kate's gift. Joyce could hardly keep back a little squeal of delight. She wanted to wake up everybody on the place and show it. Then she wished that she could be back in the brown house, showing it to her mother and the children. For a moment, as she thought of them, sharing the pleasure of their Christmas stockings without her, a great wave of homesickness swept over her, and she lay back on the pillow with that miserable, far-away feeling that, of all things, makes one most desolate.

Then she heard the rapid "tick, tick, tick, tick," of the little watch, and was

comforted. She had not realized before that time could go so fast. Now thirty seconds were gone; then sixty. At this rate it could not be such a very long time before they would be packing their trunks to start home; so Joyce concluded not to make herself unhappy by longing for the family, but to get as much pleasure as possible out of this strange Christmas abroad.

That little watch seemed to make the morning fly. She looked at it at least twenty times an hour. She had shown it to every one in the house, and was wishing that she could take it over to Jules for him to see, when Monsieur Ciseaux's carriage stopped at the gate. He was on his way to the Little Sisters of the Poor, and had come to ask Joyce to drive with him to bring his sister home.

He handed her into the carriage as if

she had been a duchess, and then seemed to forget that she was beside him; for nothing was said all the way. As the horses spun along the road in the keen morning air, the old man was busy with his memories, his head dropped forward on his breast. The child watched him, entering into this little drama as sympathetically as if she herself were the forlorn old woman, and this silent, white-haired man at her side were Jack.

Sister Denisa came running out to meet them, her face shining and her eyes glistening with tears. "It is for joy that I weep," she exclaimed, "that poor madame should have come to her own again. See the change that has already been made in her by the blessed news."

Joyce looked down the corridor as monsieur hurried forward to meet the old lady coming toward them, and to offer his arm. Hope had straightened the bowed

figure; joy had put lustre into her dark eyes and strength into her weak frame. She walked with such proud stateliness that the other inmates of the home looked up at her in surprise as she passed. She was no more like the tearful, broken-spirited woman who had lived among them so long than her threadbare dress was like the elegant mantle which monsieur had brought to fold around her.

Joyce had brought a handful of roses to Sister Denisa, who caught them up with a cry of pleasure, and held them against her face as if they carried with them some sweetness of another world.

Madame came up then, and, taking the nun in her arms, tried to thank her for all that she had done, but could find no words for a gratitude so deep, and turned away, sobbing.

They said good-bye to Sister Denisa, — brave Little Sister of the Poor, whose

only joy was the pleasure of unselfish service; who had no time to even stand at the gate and be a glad witness of other people's Christmas happiness, but must hurry back to her morning task of dealing out coffee and clean handkerchiefs to two hundred old paupers. No, there were only a hundred and ninety-nine now. Down the streets, across the Loire, into the old village and out again, along the wide Paris road, one of them was going home.

The carriage turned and went for a little space between brown fields and closely clipped hedgerows, and then madame saw the windows of her old home flashing back the morning sunlight over the high stone wall. Again the carriage turned, into the lane this time, and now the sunlight was caught up by the scissors over the gate, and thrown dazzlingly down into their faces.

Monsieur smiled as he looked at Joyce, a tender, gentle smile that one would have supposed never could have been seen on those harsh lips. She was almost standing up in the carriage, in her excitement.

"Oh, it has come true!" she cried, clasping her hands together. "The gates are really opening at last!"

Yes, the Ogre, whatever may have been its name, no longer lived. Its spell was broken, for now the giant scissors no longer barred the way. Slowly the great gate swung open, and the carriage passed through.

Joyce sprang out and ran on ahead to open the door. Hand in hand, just as when they were little children, Martin and Désiré, this white-haired brother and sister, went back to the old home together; and it was Christmas Day, in the morning.

At five o'clock that evening the sound of Gabriel's accordeon went echoing up and down the garden, and thirty little children were marching to its music along the paths, between the rows of blooming laurel. Joyce understood, now, why the room where the Christmas tree stood had been kept so carefully locked. For two days that room had been empty and the tree had been standing in Monsieur Ciseaux's parlour. Cousin Kate and madame and Berthé and Marie and Gabriel had all been over there, busily at work, and neither she nor Jules had suspected what was going on down-stairs.

Now she marched with the others, out of the garden and across the road, keeping time to the music of the wheezy old accordeon that Gabriel played so proudly. Surely every soul, in all that long procession filing through the gate of the giant scissors, belonged to the kingdom

of loving hearts and gentle hands; for they were all children who passed through, or else mothers who carried in their arms the little ones who, but for these faithful arms, must have missed this Noël fête.

Jules had been carried down-stairs and laid on a couch in the corner of the room where he could see the tree to its best advantage. Beside him sat his great-aunt, Désiré, dressed in a satin gown of silvery gray that had been her mother's, and looking as if she had just stepped out from the frame of the portrait up-stairs. She held Jules's hand in hers, as if with it she grasped the other Jules, the little brother of the olden days for whom this child had been named. And she told him stories of his grandfather and his father. Then Jules found that this Aunt Désiré had known his mother; had once sat on the vine-covered porch while he ran after

fireflies on the lawn in his little white dress; had heard the song the voice still sang to him in his dreams:

"Till the stars and the angels come to keep
Their watch where my baby lies fast asleep."

When she told him this, with her hand stroking his and folding it tight with many tender little claspings, he felt that he had found a part of his old home, too, as well as Aunt Désiré.

One by one the tapers began to glow on the great tree, and when it was all ablaze the doors were opened for the children to flock in. They stood about the room, bewildered at first, for not one of them had ever seen such a sight before; a tree that glittered and sparkled and shone, that bore stars and rainbows and snow wreaths and gay toys. At first they only drew deep, wondering breaths, and looked at each other with shining

eyes. It was all so beautiful and so strange.

Joyce flew here and there, helping to distribute the gifts, feeling her heart grow warmer and warmer as she watched the happy children. "My little daughter never had anything like that in all her life," said one grateful mother, as Joyce laid a doll in the child's outstretched arms. "She'll never forget this to her dying day, nor will any of us, dear mademoiselle! We knew not what it was to have so beautiful a Noël!"

When the last toy had been stripped from the branches, it was Cousin Kate's turn to be surprised. At a signal from madame, the children began circling around the tree, singing a song that the sisters at the village school had taught them for the occasion. It was a happy little song about the green pine-tree, king of all trees and monarch of the woods,

because of the crown he yearly wears at Noël. At the close every child came up to madame and Cousin Kate and Joyce, to say "Thank you, madame," and "Good night," in the politest way possible.

Gabriel's accordeon led them out again, and the music, growing fainter and fainter, died away in the distance; but in every heart that heard it had been born a memory whose music could never be lost, — the memory of one happy Christmas.

Joyce drew a long breath when it was all over, and, with her arm around Madame Désiré's shoulder, smiled down at Jules.

"How beautifully it has all ended!" she exclaimed. "I am sorry that we have come to the place to say 'and they all lived happily ever after,' for that means that it is time to shut the book."

"Dear heart," murmured Madame Désiré, drawing the child closer to her, "it means that a far sweeter story is just beginning, and it is you who have opened the book for me."

Joyce flushed with pleasure, saying, "I thought this Christmas would be so lonely; but it has been the happiest of my life."

"And mine, too," said Monsieur Ciseaux from the other side of Jules's couch. He took the little fellow's hand in his. "They told me about the tree that you prepared for me. I have been up to look at it, and now I have come to thank you." To the surprise of every one in the room, monsieur bent over and kissed the flushed little face on the pillow. Jules reached up, and, putting his arms around his uncle's neck, laid his cheek a moment against the face of his stern old kinsman. Not a word was said, but in that silent

caress every barrier of coldness and reserve was for ever broken down between them. So the little Prince came into his kingdom, — the kingdom of love and real home happiness.

It is summer now, and far away in the little brown house across the seas Joyce thinks of her happy winter in France and the friends that she found through the gate of the giant scissors. And still those scissors hang over the gate, and may be seen to this day, by any one who takes the trouble to walk up the hill from the little village that lies just across the river Loire, from the old town of Tours.

Two Little Knights of Kentucky

TO

Margaret and Albion

Mary, Helen, Lura and
Rose

William and George

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Knighthood has not passed away. The flower of Chivalry has blossomed anew in this New World, and America, too, has her "Hall of the Shields."

Two Little Knights of Kentucky

CHAPTER I

TWO TRAMPS AND A BEAR

T was the coldest Saint Valentine's eve that Kentucky had known in twenty years. In Lloydsborough Valley a thin sprinkling of snow whitened the meadows, enough to show the footprints of every hungry rabbit that loped across them; but there were not many such tracks. It was so cold that the rabbits, for all their thick fur, were glad to run home and hide. Nobody cared to be out long in such weather, and

except now and then, when an ice-cutter's wagon creaked up from some pond to the frozen pike, the wintry stillness was unbroken.

On the north side of the little country depot a long row of icicles hung from the eaves. Even the wind seemed to catch its breath there, and hurry on with a shiver that reached to the telegraph wires overhead. It shivered down the long stovepipe, too, inside the waiting-room. The stove had been kept red-hot all that dull gray afternoon, but the window-panes were still white with heavy frostwork.

Half an hour before the five o'clock train was due from the city, two boys came running up the railroad track with their skates in their hands. They were handsome, sturdy little fellows, so well buttoned up in their leather leggins and warm reefer overcoats that they scarcely felt the cold. Their cheeks were red as winter apples, from

skating against the wind, and they were almost breathless after their long run uphill to the depot. Racing across the platfrom, they bumped against the door at the same instant, burst it noisily open, and slammed it behind with a bang that shook the entire building.

"What kind of a cyclone has struck us now?" growled the ticket agent, who was in the next room. Then he frowned, as the first noise was followed by the rasping sound of a bench being dragged out of a corner, to a place nearer the stove. It scraped the bare floor every inch of the way, with a jarring motion that made the windows rattle.

Stretching himself half-way out of his chair, the ticket agent pushed up the wooden slide of the little window far enough for him to peep into the waiting-room. Then he hastily shoved it down again.

"It's the two little chaps who came out

from the city last week," he said to the station-master. "The MacIntyre boys. You'd think they own the earth from the way they dash in and take possession of things."

The station-master liked boys. He stroked his gray beard and chuckled. "Well, Meyers," he said, slowly, "when you come to think of it, their family always has owned a pretty fair slice of the earth and its good things, and those same little lads have travelled nearly all over it, although the oldest can't be more than ten. It would be a wonder if they didn't have that lordly way of making themselves at home wherever they go."

"Will they be out here all winter?" asked Meyers, who was a newcomer in Lloydsborough.

"Yes, their father and mother have gone to Florida, and left them here with their grandmother MacIntyre."

"I imagine the old lady has her hands full," said Meyers, as a sound of scuffling in the next room reached him.

"Oh, I don't know about that, now," said the station-master. "They're noisy children, to be sure, and just boiling over with mischief, but if you can find any better-mannered little gentlemen anywhere in the State when there's ladies around, I'd like you to trot 'em out. They came down to the train with their aunt this morning, Miss Allison MacIntyre, and their politeness to her was something pretty to see, I can tell you, sir."

There was a moment's pause, in which the boys could be heard laughing in the next room.

"No," said the station-master again, "I'm thinking it's not the boys who will be keeping Mrs. MacIntyre's hands full this winter, so much as that little granddaughter of hers that came here last fall, — little

Virginia Dudley. You can guess what's she like from her nickname. They call her Ginger. She had always lived at some army post out West, until her father, Captain Dudley, was ordered to Cuba. He was wounded down there, and has never been entirely well since. When he found they were going to keep him there all winter, he sent for his wife last September, and there was nothing to do with Virginia but to bring her back to Kentucky to her grandmother."

"Oh, she's the little girl who went in on the train this morning with Miss Allison," said the ticket agent. "I suppose the boys have come down to meet them. They'll have a long time to wait."

While this conversation was going on behind the ticket window, the two boys stretched themselves out on a long bench beside the stove. The warm room made them feel drowsy after their violent out-door

exercise. Keith, the younger one, yawned several times, and finally lay down on the bench with his cap for a pillow. He was eight years old, but curled up in that fashion, with his long eyelashes resting on his red cheeks, and one plump little hand tucked under his chin, he looked much younger.

"Wake me up, Malcolm, when it's time for Aunt Allison's train," he said to his brother. "Ginger would never stop teasing me if she should find me asleep."

Malcolm unbuttoned his reefer, and, after much tugging, pulled out a handsome little gold watch. "Oh, there's a long time to wait!" he exclaimed. "We need not have left the pond so early, for the train will not be here for twenty-five minutes. I believe I'll curl up here myself, till then. I hope they won't forget the valentines we sent for."

The room was very still for a few minutes.

There was no sound at all except the crackling of the fire and the shivering of the wind in the long stovepipe. Then some one turned the door-knob so cautiously and slowly that it unlatched without a sound.

It was the cold air rushing into the room as the door was pushed ajar that aroused the boys. After one surprised glance they sat up, for the man, who was slipping into the room as stealthily as a burglar, was the worst-looking tramp they had ever seen. There was a long, ugly red scar across his face, running from his cheek to the middle of his forehead, and partly closing one eye. Perhaps it was the scar that gave him such a queer, evil sort of an expression; even without it he would have been a repulsive sight. His clothes were dirty and ragged, and his breath had frozen in icicles on his stubby red beard.

Behind him came a boy no larger than Keith, but with a hard, shrewd look in his

hungry little face that made one feel he had lived a long time and learned more than was good for him to know. It was plain to be seen that he was nearly starved, and suffering from the intense cold. His bare toes peeped through their ragged shoes, and he had no coat. A thin cotton shirt and a piece of an old gray horse-blanket was all that protected his shoulders from the icy wind of that February afternoon. He, too, crept in noiselessly, as if expecting to be ordered out at the first sound, and then turned to coax in some animal that was tied to one end of the rope which he held.

Malcolm and Keith looked on with interest, and sprang up excitedly as the animal finally shuffled in far enough for the boy to close the door behind it. It was a great, shaggy bear, taller than the man when it sat upon its haunches beside him.

The tramp looked uneasily around the room for an instant, but seeing no one save

the two children, ventured nearer the stove. The boy followed him, and the bear shuffled along behind them both, limping painfully. Not a word was said for a moment. The boys were casting curious glances at the three tramps who had come in as noiselessly as if they had snowed down, and the man was watching the boys with shrewd eyes. He did not seem to be looking at them, but at the end of his survey he could have described them accurately. He had noticed every detail of their clothing, from their expensive leather leggins to their fur-lined gloves. He glanced at Malcolm's watch-chain and the fine skates which Keith swung back and forth by a strap, and made up his mind, correctly, too, that the pockets of these boys rarely lacked the jingle of money which they could spend as they pleased.

When he turned away to hold his hands out toward the stove, he rubbed them to-

gether with satisfaction, for he had discovered more than that. He knew from their faces that they were trusting little souls, who would believe any story he might tell them, if he appealed to their sympathies in the right way. He was considering how to begin, when Malcolm broke the silence.

"Is that a trained bear?"

The man nodded.

"What can it do?" was the next question.

"Oh, lots of things," answered the man, in a low, whining voice. "Drill like a soldier, and dance, and ride a stick." He kept his shifty eyes turning constantly toward the door, as if afraid some one might overhear him.

"I'd put him through his paces for you young gen'lemen," he said, "but he got his foot hurt for one thing, and another is, if we went to showing off, we might be ordered to move on. This is the first time we've smelled a fire in twenty-four hours, and we

ain't in no hurry to leave it, I can tell you."

"Will he bite?" asked Keith, going up to the huge bear, which had stretched itself out comfortably on the floor.

"Not generally. He's a good-tempered brute, most times like a lamb. But he ain't had nothing to eat all day, so it wouldn't be surprising if he was a bit snappish."

"Nothing to eat!" echoed Keith. "You poor old thing!" Going a step closer, he put out his hand and stroked the bear, as if it had been a great dog.

"Oh, Malcolm, just feel how soft his fur is, like mamma's beaver jacket. And he has the kindest old face. Poor old fellow, is you hungry? Never mind, Keith'll get you something to eat pretty soon."

Putting his short, plump arms around the animal's neck, he hugged it lovingly up to him. A cunning gleam came into the man's eyes. He saw that he had gained the

younger boy's sympathy, and he wanted Malcolm's also.

"Is your home near here, my little gen'leman?" he asked, in a friendly tone.

"No, we live in the city," answered Malcolm, "but my grandmother's place, where we are staying, is not far from here." He was stroking the bear with one hand as he spoke, and hunting in his pocket with the other, hoping to find some stray peanuts to give it.

"Then maybe you know of some place where we could stay to-night. Even a shed to crawl into would keep us from freezing. It's an awful cold night not to have a roof over your head, or a crust to gnaw on, or a spark of fire to keep life in your body."

"Maybe they'd let you stay in the waiting-room," suggested Malcolm. "It is always good and warm in here. I'll ask the station-master. He's a friend of mine."

"Oh, no! No, don't!" exclaimed the

tramp, hastily, pulling his old hat farther over his forehead, as if to hide the scar, and looking uneasily around. "I wouldn't have you do that for anything. I've had dealings with such folks before, and I know how they'd treat me. I thought maybe there was a barn or a hay-shed or something on your grandmother's place, where we could lay up for repairs a couple of days. The beast needs a rest. Its foot's sore; and Jonesy there is pretty near to lung fever, judging from the way he coughs." He nodded toward the boy, who had placed his chair as close to the stove as possible. The child's face was drawn into a pucker by the tingling pains in his half-frozen feet, and his efforts to keep from coughing.

Malcolm looked at him steadily. He had read about boys who were homeless and hungry and cold, but he had never really understood how much it meant to be all that. This was the first time in his ten

short years that he had ever come close to real poverty. He had seen the swarms of beggars that infest such cities as Naples and Rome, and had tossed them coppers because that seemed a part of the programme in travelling. He had not really felt sorry for them, for they did not seem to mind it. They sat on the steps in the warm Italian sunshine, and waited for tourists to throw them money, as comfortably as toads sit blinking at flies. But this was different. A wave of pity swept through Malcolm's generous little heart as he looked at Jonesy, and the man watching him shrewdly saw it.

"Of course," he whined, "a little gen'leman like you don't know what it is to go from town to town and have every door shut in your face. You don't think that this is a hard-hearted, stingy old world, because it has given you the cream of everything. But if you'd never had anything all your life but other people's scraps and

leavings, and you hadn't any home or friends or money, and was sick besides, you'd think things wasn't very evenly divided. Wouldn't you now? You'd think it wasn't right that some should have all that heart can wish, and others not enough to keep soul and body together. If you'd a-happened to be Jonesy, and Jonesy had a-happened to 'a' been you, I reckon you'd feel it was pretty tough to see such a big difference between you. It doesn't seem fair now, does it?"

"No," admitted Malcolm, faintly. He had taken a dislike to the man. He could not have told why, but his child instinct armed him with a sudden distrust. Still, he felt the force of the whining appeal, and the burden of an obligation to help them seemed laid upon his shoulders.

"Grandmother is afraid for anybody to sleep in the barn, on account of fire," he said, after a moment's thought, "and I'm

sure she wouldn't let you come into the house without you'd had a bath and some clean clothes. Grandmother is dreadfully particular," he added, hastily, not wanting to be impolite even to a tramp. "Seems to me Keith and I have to spend half our time washing our hands and putting on clean collars."

"Oh, I know a place," cried Keith. "There's that empty cabin down by the spring-house. Nobody has lived in it since the new servants' cottage was built. There isn't any furniture in it, but there's a fireplace in one room, and it would be warmer than the barn."

"That's just the trick!" exclaimed Malcolm. "We can carry a pile of hay over from the barn for you to sleep on. Aunt Allison will be out on this next train and I'll ask her. I am sure she will let you, because last night, when it was so cold, she said she felt sorry for anything that had to

be out in it, even the poor old cedar-trees, with the sleet on their branches. She said that it was King Lear's own weather, and she could understand how Cordelia felt when she said, 'mine enemy's dog, though he had bit me, should have stood that night against my fire!' It is just like auntie to feel that way about it, only she's so good to everybody she couldn't have any enemies."

Something like a smile moved the tramp's stubby beard. "So she's that kind, is she? Well, if she could have a soft spot for a dog that had bit her, and an enemy's dog at that, it stands to reason that she wouldn't object to some harmless travellers a-sleeping in an empty cabin a couple of nights. S'pose'n you show us the place, sonny, and we'll be moving on."

"Oh, it wouldn't be right not to ask her first," exclaimed Malcolm. "She'll be here in such a little while."

The man looked uneasy. Presently he

walked over to the window and scraped a peep-hole on the frosted pane with his dirty thumb-nail. "Sun's down," he said. "I'd like to get that bear's foot fixed comfortable before it grows any darker. I'd like to mighty well. It'll take some time to heat water to dress it. Is that cabin far from here?"

"Not if we go in at the back of the place," said Malcolm. "It's just across the meadow, and over a little hill. If we went around by the big front gate it would be a good deal longer."

The man shifted uneasily from one foot to another, and complained of being hungry. He was growing desperate. For more reasons than one he did not want to be at the station when the train came in. That long red scar across his face had been described a number of times in the newspapers, and he did not care to be recognised just then.

The boys could not have told how it came

about, but in a few minutes they were leading the way toward the cabin. The man had persuaded them that it was not at all necessary to wait for their Aunt Allison's permission, and that it was needless to trouble their grandmother. Why should the ladies be bothered about a matter that the boys were old enough to decide? So well had he argued, and so tactfully had he flattered them, that when they took their way across the field, it was with the feeling that they were doing their highest duty in getting these homeless wayfarers to the cabin as quickly as possible, on their own responsibility.

"We can get back in time to meet the train, if we hurry," said Malcolm, looking at his watch again. "There's still fifteen minutes."

No one saw the little procession file out of the waiting-room and across the snowy field, for it was growing dark, and the lamps were

lighted and the curtains drawn in the few houses they passed. Malcolm went first, proudly leading the friendly old bear. Jonesy came next beside Keith, and the man shuffled along in the rear, looking around with suspicious glances whenever a twig snapped, or a distant dog barked.

As the wind struck against Jonesy's body, he drew the bit of blanket more closely around him, and coughed hoarsely. His teeth were chattering and his lips blue. "You look nearly frozen," said Keith, who, well-clad and well-fed, scarcely felt the cold. "Here! put this on, or you'll be sick." Unbuttoning his thick little reefer, he pulled it off and tied its sleeves around Jonesy's neck.

A strange look passed over the face of the man behind them. "Blessed if the little kid didn't take it off his own back," he muttered. "If any man had ever done that for me — just once — well, maybe, I wouldn't ha' been what I am now!"

For a moment, as they reached the top of the hill, bear, boys, and man were outlined blackly against the sky like strange silhouettes. Then they passed over and disappeared in the thick clump of pine-trees, which hid the little cabin from the eyes of the surrounding world.

CHAPTER II

GINGER AND THE BOYS

N less time than one would think possible, a big fire was roaring in the cabin fireplace, water was steaming in the rusty kettle on the crane, and a pile of hay and old carpet lay in one corner, ready to be made into a bed. Keith had made several trips to the kitchen, and came back each time with his hands full.

Old Daphne, the cook, never could find it in her heart to refuse "Marse Sydney's" boys anything. They were too much like what their father had been at their age to

resist their playful coaxing. She had nursed him when he was a baby, and had been his loyal champion all through his boyhood. Now her black face wrinkled into smiles whenever she heard his name spoken. In her eyes, nobody was quite so near perfection as he, except, perhaps, the fair woman whom he had married.

"Kain't nobody in ten States hole a can'le to my Marse Sidney an' his Miss Elise," old Daphne used to say, proudly. "They sut'nly is the handsomest couple evah jined togethah, an' the free-handedest. In all they travels by sea or by land they nevah fo'gits ole Daphne. I've got things from every country undah the shinin' sun what they done brung me."

Now, all the services she had once been proud to render them were willingly given to their little sons. When Keith came in with a pitiful tale of a tramp who was starving at their very gates, she gave him

even more than he asked for, and almost more than he could carry.

The bear and its master were so hungry, and their two little hosts so interested in watching them eat, that they forgot all about going back to meet the train. They did not even hear it whistle when it came puffing into the Valley.

As Miss Allison stepped from the car to the station platform, she looked around in vain for the boys who had promised to meet her. Her arms were so full of bundles, as suburban passengers' usually are, that she could not hold up her long broadcloth skirt, or even turn her handsome fur collar higher over her ears. With a shade of annoyance on her pretty face, she swept across the platform and into the waiting-room, out of the cold.

Behind her came a little girl about ten years old, as unlike her as possible, although it was Virginia Dudley's ambition to be

exactly like her Aunt Allison. She wanted to be tall, and slender, and grown up; Miss Allison was that, and yet she had kept all her lively girlish ways, and a love of fun that made her charming to everybody, young and old. Virginia longed for wavy brown hair and white hands, and especially for a graceful, easy manner. Her hair was short and black, and her complexion like a gypsy's. She had hard, brown little fists, sharp gray eyes that seemed to see everything at once, and a tongue that was always getting her into trouble. As for the ease of manner, that might come in time, but her stately old grandmother often sighed in secret over Virginia's awkwardness.

She stumbled now as she followed the young lady into the waiting-room. Her big, plume-covered hat tipped over one ear, but she, too, had so many bundles, that she could not spare a hand to straighten it.

"Well, Virginia, what do you suppose has

become of the boys?" asked her aunt. "They promised to meet us and carry our packages."

"I heard them in here about half an hour ago, Miss Allison," said the station-master, who had come in with a lantern. "I s'pose they got tired of waiting. Better leave your things here, hadn't you? I'll watch them. It is mighty slippery walking this evening."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Mason," she answered, beginning to pile boxes and packages upon a bench. "I'll send Pete down for them immediately. Now, Virginia, turn up your coat collar and hold your muff over your nose, or Jack Frost will make an icicle out of you before you are half-way home.

They had been in the house some time before the boys remembered their promise to meet them at the station. When they saw how late it was, they started home on the run.

"I am fairly aching to tell Ginger about

that bear," panted Keith, as they reached the side door. "I am so sorry that we promised the man not to say anything about them being on the place, before he sees us again to-morrow. I wonder why he asked us that."

"I don't know," answered Malcolm. "He seemed to have some very good reason, and he talked about it so that it didn't seem right not to promise a little thing like that."

"I wish we hadn't, though," said Keith, again.

"But it's done now," persisted Malcolm. "We're bound not to tell, and you can't get out of it, for he made us give him our word 'on the honour of a gentleman'; and that settles it, you know."

They were two very dirty boys who clattered up the back stairs, and raced to their room to dress for dinner. Their clothes were covered with hayseed and straw, and their hands and faces were black with soot

from the old cabin chimney. They had both helped to build the fire.

The lamps had just been lighted in the upper hall, and Virginia came running out from her room when she heard the boys' voices.

"Why didn't you meet us at the train?" she began, but stopped as she saw their dirty faces. "Where on earth have you chimney-sweeps been?" she cried.

"Oh, about and about," answered Malcolm, teasingly. "Don't you wish you knew?"

Virginia shrugged her shoulders, as if she had not the slightest interest in the matter, and held out two packages.

"Here are the valentines you sent for. You just ought to see the pile that Aunt Allison bought. We've the best secret about to-morrow that ever was."

"So have we," began Keith, but Malcolm clapped a sooty hand over his mouth and

pulled him toward the door of their room. "Come on," he said. "We've barely time to dress for dinner. Don't you know enough to keep still, you little magpie?" he exclaimed, as the door banged behind them. "The only way to keep a secret is not to act like you have one!"

Virginia walked slowly back to her room and paused in the doorway, wondering what she could do to amuse herself until dinner-time. It was a queer room for a girl, decorated with flags and Indian trophies and everything that could remind her of the military life she loved, at the far-away army post. There were photographs framed in brass buttons on her dressing-table, and pictures of uniformed officers all over the walls. A canteen and an army cap, with a bullet-hole through the crown, hung over her desk, and a battered bugle, that had sounded many a triumphant charge, swung from the corner of her mirror.

Each souvenir had a history, and had been given her at parting by some special friend. Every one at the fort had made a pet of Captain Dudley's daughter, — the harum-scarum little Ginger, — who would rather dash across the prairies on her pony, like a wild Comanche Indian, than play with the finest doll ever imported from Paris.

There was a suit in her wardrobe, short skirt, jacket, leggins, and moccasins, all made and beaded by the squaws. It was the gift of the colonel's wife. Mrs. Dudley had hesitated some time before putting it in one of the trunks that was to go back to Kentucky.

"You look so much like an Indian now," she said to Virginia. "Your face is so sunburned that I am afraid your grandmother will be scandalised. I don't know what she would say if she knew that I ever allowed you to run so wild. If I had known that you were going back to civilisation I cer-

tainly should not have kept your hair cut short, and you should have worn sunbonnets all summer."

To Mrs. Dudley's great surprise, her little daughter threw herself into her arms, sobbing, "Oh, mamma! I don't want to go back to Kentucky! Take me to Cuba with you! Please do, or else let me stay here at the post. Everybody will take care of me here! I'll just die if you leave me in Kentucky!"

"Why, darling," she said, soothingly, as she wiped her tears away and rocked her back and forth in her arms, "I thought you have always wanted to see mamma's old home, and the places you have heard so much about. There are all the old toys in the nursery that we had when we were children, and the grape-vine swing in the orchard, and the mill-stream where we fished, and the beech-woods where we had such delightful picnics. I thought it would

be so nice for you to do all the same things that made me so happy when I was a child, and go to school in the same old Girls' College and know all the dear old neighbours that I knew. Wouldn't my little girl like that?"

"Oh, yes, some, I s'pose," sobbed Virginia, "but I didn't know I'd have to be so — so — everlastingly — civilised!" she wailed. "I don't want to always have to dress just so, and have to walk in a path and be called Virginia all the time. That sounds so stiff and proper. I'd rather stay where people don't mind if I am sunburned and tanned, and won't be scandalised at everything I do. It's so much nicer to be just plain Ginger!"

It had been five months, now, since Virginia left Fort Dennis. At first she had locked herself in her room nearly every day, and, with her face buried in her Indian suit, cried to go back. She missed the gay mili-

tary life of the army post, as a sailor would miss the sea, or an Alpine shepherd the free air of his snow-capped mountain heights.

It was not that she did not enjoy being at her grandmother's. She liked the great gray house whose square corner tower and overhanging vines made it look like an old castle. She liked the comfort and elegance of the big, stately rooms, and she had her grandmother's own pride in the old family portraits and the beautiful carved furniture. The negro servants seemed so queer and funny to her that she found them a great source of amusement, and her Aunt Allison planned so many pleasant occupations outside of school-hours that she scarcely had time to get lonesome. But she had a shut-in feeling, like a wild bird in a cage, and sometimes the longing for liberty which her mother had allowed her made her fret against the thousand little proprieties she had to observe. Sometimes when she went

tipping over the polished floors of the long drawing-room, and caught sight of herself in one of the big mirrors, she felt that she was not herself at all, but somebody in a story. The Virginia in the looking-glass seemed so very, very civilised. More than once, after one of these meetings with herself in the mirror, she dashed up-stairs, locked her door, and dressed herself in her Indian suit. Then in her noiseless moccasins she danced the wildest of war-dances, whispering shrilly between her teeth, "Now I'm Ginger! Now I'm Ginger! And I won't be dressed up, and I won't learn my lessons, and I won't be a little lady, and I'll run away and go back to Fort Dennis the very first chance I get!"

Usually she was ashamed of these outbursts afterwards, for it always happened that after each one she found her Aunt Allison had planned something especially pleasant for her entertainment. Miss Alli-

son felt sorry for the lonely child, who had never been separated from her father and mother before, so she devoted her time to her as much as possible, telling her stories and entering into her plays and pleasures as if they had both been the same age.

Since the boys had come, Virginia had not had a single homesick moment. While she was at school in the primary department of the Girls' College, Malcolm and Keith were reciting their lessons to the old minister who lived across the road from Mrs. MacIntyre's. They were all free about the same hour, and even on the coldest days played out-of-doors from lunch-time until dark.

To-night Virginia had so many experiences to tell them of her day in town that the boys seemed unusually long in dressing. She was so impatient for them to hear her news that she could not settle down to anything, but walked restlessly around the room, wishing they would hurry.

"Oh, I haven't sorted my valentines!" she exclaimed, presently, picking up a fancy box which she had tossed on the bed when she first came in. "I'll take them down to the library."

There was no one in the room when she peeped in. It looked so bright and cosy with the great wood fire blazing on the hearth and the rose-coloured light falling from its softly shaded lamps, that she forgot the coldness of the night outside. Sitting down on a pile of cushions at one end of the hearth-rug, she began sorting her purchases, trying to decide to whom each one should be sent.

"The prettiest valentine of all must go to poor papa," she said to herself, "'cause he's been so sick away down there in Cuba; and this one that's got the little girl on it in a blue dress shall be for my dear, sweet mamma, 'cause it will make her think of me."

For a moment, a mist seeemd to blur the gay blue dress of the little valentine girl as Virginia looked at her, thinking of her far-away mother. She drew her hand hastily across her eyes and went on:

"This one is for Sergeant Jackson out at Fort Dennis, and the biggest one, with the doves, for Colonel Philips and his wife. Dear me! I wish I could send one to every officer and soldier out there. They were all so good to me!"

The pile of lace-paper cupids and hearts and arrows and roses slipped from her lap, down to the rug, as she clasped her hands around her knees and looked into the fire. She wished that she could be back again at the fort, long enough to live one of those beautiful old days from reveille to taps. How she loved the bugle-calls and the wild thrill the band gave her, when it struck up a burst of martial music, and the troops went dashing by! How she missed the

drills and the dress parades; her rides across the open prairie on her pony, beside her father; how she missed the games she used to play with the other children at the fort on the long summer evenings!

Something more than a mist was gathering in her eyes now. Two big tears were almost ready to fall when the door opened and Mrs. MacIntyre came in. In Virginia's eyes she was the most beautiful grandmother any one ever had. She was not so tall as her daughter Allison, and in that respect fell short of the little girl's ideal, but her hair, white as snow, curled around her face in the same soft, pretty fashion, and by every refined feature she showed her kinship to the aristocratic old faces which looked down from the family portraits in the hall.

"I couldn't be as stately and dignified as she is if I practised a thousand years," thought Virginia, scrambling up from the pile of cushions to roll a chair nearer the

fire. As she did so, her heel caught in a rug, and she fell back in an awkward little heap.

"The more haste, the less grace, my dear," said her grandmother, kindly, thanking her for the proffered chair. Virginia blushed, wondering why she always appeared so awkward in her grandmother's presence. She envied the boys because they never seemed embarrassed or ill at ease before her.

While she was picking up her valentines the boys came in. If two of the cavalier ancestors had stepped down from their portrait frames just then, they could not have come into the room in a more charming manner than Malcolm and Keith. Their faces were shining, their linen spotless, and they came up to kiss their grandmother's cheek with an old-time courtliness that delighted her.

"I am sure that there are no more perfect

gentlemen in all Kentucky than my two little lads," she said, fondly, with an approving pat of Keith's hand as she held him a moment.

Virginia, who had seen them half an hour before, tousled and dirty, and had been arrayed against them in more than one hot quarrel where they had been anything but chivalrous, let slip a faintly whistled "cuckoo!"

The boys darted a quick glance in her direction, but she was bending over the valentines with a very serious face, which never changed its expression till her Aunt Allison came in and the boys began their apologies for not meeting her at the train. Their only excuse was that they had forgotten all about it.

Virginia spelled on her fingers: "I dare you to tell what made your faces so black!" Keith's only answer was to thrust his tongue out at her behind his grandmother's back.

Then he ran to hold the door open for the ladies to pass out to dinner, with all the grace of a young Chesterfield.

When dinner was over and they were back in the library, Miss Allison opened a box of tiny heart-shaped envelopes, and began addressing them. As she took up her pen she said, merrily: "Now you may tell our secret, Virginia."

"I was going to make you guess for about an hour," said Virginia, "but it is so nice I can't wait that long to tell you. We are going to have a valentine party to-morrow night. Aunt Allison planned it all a week ago, and bought the things for it while we were in town to-day. Everything on the table is to be cut in heart shape, — the bread and butter and sandwiches and cheese; and the ice-cream will be moulded in hearts, and the two big frosted cakes are hearts, one pink and one white, with candy arrows sticking in them. Then there will be pep-

permint candy hearts with mottoes printed on them, and lace-paper napkins with verses on them, so that the table itself will look like a lovely big valentine. The games are lovely, too. One is parlour archery, with a red heart in the middle of the target, and two prizes, one for the boys and one for the girls."

"Who are invited?" asked Malcolm, as Virginia stopped for breath.

"Oh, the Carrington boys, and the Edmunds, and Sally Fairfax, and Julia Ferris, — I can't remember them all. There will be twenty-four, counting us. There is the list on the table."

Keith reached for it, and began slowly spelling out the names. "Who is this?" he asked, reading the name that headed the list. "'The Little Colonel!' I never heard of him."

"Oh, he's a girl!" laughed Virginia. "Little Lloyd Sherman, — don't you know?

She lives up at 'The Locusts,' that lovely place with the long avenue of trees leading up to the house. You've surely seen her with her grandfather, old Colonel Lloyd, riding by on the horse that he calls Maggie Boy."

"Has he only one arm?" asked Malcolm.

"Yes, the other was shot off in the war years ago. Well, when Lloyd was younger, she had a temper so much like his, and wore such a dear little Napoleon hat, that everybody took to calling her the Little Colonel."

"How old is she now?" asked Malcolm.

"About Keith's age, isn't she, Aunt Allison?" asked Virginia.

"Yes," was the answer. "She is nearly eight, I believe. She has outgrown most of her naughtiness now."

"I love to hear her talk," said Virginia. "She leaves out all of her r's in such a soft, sweet way."

"All Southerners do that," said Malcolm,

pompously, "and I think it sounds lots better than the way Yankees talk."

"You boys don't talk like the Little Colonel," retorted Virginia, who had often been teased by them for not being a Southerner. "You're all mixed up every which way. Some things you say like darkeys, and some things like English people, and it doesn't sound a bit like the Little Colonel."

"Oh, well, that's because we've travelled abroad so much, don't you know," drawled Malcolm, "and we've been in so many different countries, and had an English tutor, and all that sort of a thing. We couldn't help picking up a bit of an accent, don't you know." His superior tone made Virginia long to slap him.

"Yes, I know, Mr. Brag," she said, in such a low voice that her grandmother could not hear. "I know perfectly well. If I didn't it wouldn't be because you haven't told me every chance you got. Who did

you say is your tailor in London, and how many times was it the Queen invited you out to Windsor? I think it's a ninety-nine dollar cravat you always buy, isn't it? And you wouldn't be so common as to wear a pair of gloves that hadn't been made to order specially for you. Yes, I've heard all about it!"

Miss Allison heard, but said nothing. She knew the boys were a little inclined to boast, and she thought Virginia's sharp tongue might have a good effect. But the retort had grown somewhat sharper than was pleasant, and, fearing a quarrel might follow if she did not interrupt the whispers beside her, she said:

"Boys, did you ever hear about the time that the Little Colonel threw mud on her grandfather's coat? There's no end to her pranks. Get grandmother to tell you."

"Oh, yes, please, grandmother," begged Keith, with an arm around her neck. "Tell

about Fritz and the parrot, too," said Virginia. "Here, Malcolm, there's room on this side for you."

Aunt Allison smiled. The storm had blown over, and they were all friends again.

CHAPTER III

THE VALENTINE PARTY

OW we can tell Ginger about the bear," was Keith's first remark, when he awoke early next morning.

"But not until after we have seen the man again," answered Malcolm. "You know we promised him that."

"Then let's go down before breakfast," exclaimed Keith, springing out of bed and beginning to dress himself. A little while later, the old coloured coachman saw them run past the window, where he was warming himself by the kitchen stove.

"Daphne," he called out to the cook, who was beating biscuit in the adjoining pantry, "Daphne, what's dem chillun alluz racin' down to de spring-house fo' in de snow? Peah's lak dee has a heap o' business down yandah."

Daphne, who had just been coaxed into filling a basket with a generous supply of cold victuals, pretended not to hear until he repeated his question. Then she stopped pounding long enough to say, sharply, "Whuffo' you alluz 'spicion dem boys so evahlastin'ly, Unc' Henry? Lak enough dee's settin' a rabbit trap. Boys has done such things befo'. You's done it yo'se'f, hasn't you?"

Daphne had seen them setting rabbit traps there, but she knew well enough that was not what they had gone for now, and that the food they carried was not for the game of Robinson Crusoe, which they had played in the deserted cabin the summer before.

Still, she did not care to take Unc' Henry into her confidence.

The food, the warmth, and the night's rest had so restored the bear that it was able to go through all its performances for the boys' entertainment, although it limped badly.

"Isn't he a dandy?" cried Keith; "I wish we had one. It's nicer than any pets we ever had, except the ponies. Something always happened to the dogs, and the monkey was such a nuisance, and the white rabbits were stolen, and the guinea pigs died."

"Haven't we had a lot of things, when you come to think of it?" exclaimed Malcolm. "Squirrels, and white mice, and the coon that Uncle Harry brought us, and the parrot from Mexico."

"Yes, and the gold-fish, and the little baby alligator that froze to death in its tank," added Keith. "But a bear like this would be nicer than any of them. As soon as papa

comes home I am going to ask him to buy us one."

"Jonesy's nearly done for," said the tramp, pointing to the boy who lay curled up in the hay, coughing at nearly every breath. "We ought to stay here another day, if you young gen'lemen don't object."

"Oh, Goody!" cried Keith. "Then we can bring Ginger down to see the bear perform."

"Yes," answered the man, "we'll give a free show to all your friends, if you will only kindly wait till to-morrow. Give us one more day to rest up and get in a little better trim. The poor beast's foot is still too lame for him to do his best, and you're too kind-hearted, I am sure, to want anything to suffer in order to give you pleasure."

"Of course," answered both the boys, agreeing so quickly to all the man's smooth speeches that, before they left the cabin, they had renewed their promise to keep silent one more day. The man was a shrewd

one, and knew well how to make these unsuspecting little souls serve his purpose, like puppets tied to a string.

Miss Allison was so busy with preparations for the party that she had no time all that day to notice what the boys were doing. When they came back from reciting their lessons to the minister she sent them on several errands, but the rest of the time they divided between the cabin and the post-office.

Every mail brought a few valentines to each of them, but it was not until the five o'clock train came that they found the long-looked-for letters from their father and mother.

"I knew they'd each send us a valentine," cried Keith, tearing both of his open. "I'll bet that papa's is a comic one. Yes, here it is. Papa is such a tease. Isn't it a stunner? a base-ball player. And, whoopee! Here's a dollar bill in each of 'em."

"So there is in mine," said Malcolm. "Mamma says we are to buy anything we want, and call it a valentine. They couldn't find anything down on the coast that they thought we would like."

"I don't know what to get with mine," said Keith, folding his two bills together. "Seems to me I have everything I want except a camera, and I couldn't buy the kind I want for two dollars."

They were half-way home when a happy thought came to Malcolm. "Keith," he cried, excitedly, "if you would put your money with mine, that would make four dollars, and maybe it would be enough to buy that bear!"

"Let's do it!" exclaimed Keith, turning a handspring in the snow to show his delight. "Come on, we'll ask the man now."

But the man shook his head, when they dashed into the cabin and told their errand. "No, sonny, that ain't a tenth of what it's

worth to me," he said. "I've raised that bear from the time it was a teeny cub. I've taught it, and fed it, and looked to it for company when I hadn't nobody in the world to care for me. Couldn't sell that bear for no such sum as that. Couldn't you raise any more money than that?"

It was Malcolm's turn to shake his head. He turned away, too disappointed to trust himself to answer any other way. The tears sprang to Keith's eyes. He had set his heart on having that bear.

"Never mind, brother," said Malcolm, moving toward the door. "Papa will get us one when he comes home and finds how much we want one."

"Oh, don't be in such a hurry, young gen'lemen," whined the man, when he saw that they were really going. "I didn't say that I wouldn't sell it to you for that much. You've been so kind to me that I ought to be willing to make any sacrifice for you.

I happen to need four dollars very particular just now, and I've a mind to sell him to you on your own terms." He paused a moment, looking thoughtfully at a crack in the floor, as he stood by the fire with his hands in his pockets. "Yes," he said, at last, "you can have him for four dollars, if you'll keep mum about us being here for one more day. You can leave the bear here till we go."

"No! No!" cried Keith, throwing his arms around the animal's neck. "He is ours now, and we must take him with us. We can hide him away in the barn. It is so dark out-doors now that nobody will see us. It wouldn't seem like he is really ours if we could take him with us.

After some grumbling the man consented, and pocketed the four dollars, first asking very particularly the exact spot in the barn where they expected to hide their huge pet.

Unc' Henry, coming up from the carriage-house through the twilight, thought he

saw some one stealing along by the clump of cedars by the spring-house. "Who's prowlin' roun' dis yere premises?" he called. There was no answer, and, after peering intently through the dusk for a moment, the old darkey concluded that he must have been mistaken, and passed on. As soon as he was gone, the boys came out from behind the cedars, and crept up the snowy hillside. They were leading the bear between them.

"We'll put him away back in the hay-mow where he'll be warm and comfortable to-night," whispered Malcolm. "Then in the morning we can tell everybody."

While they were busily scooping out a big hollow in the hay, they were startled by a rustling behind them. They looked into each other's frightened faces, and then glanced around the dark barn in alarm. An old cap pushed up through the hay. Then a weak little cough betrayed Jonesy. He had followed them.

"Sh!" he said, in a warning whisper. "I'm afraid the boss will find out that I'm here. He started to the store for some tobacco as soon as you left. He's been wild fer some, but didn't have no money. Don't you leave that bear out here to-night, if you ever expect to see it again! That wasn't true what he told you. He never saw the bear till two months ago, and he sold it to you cheap because he's a-goin' to steal it back again to-night, and make off up the road with it. He went off a-grinnin' over the slick way he'd fooled you, and I jes' had to come and tell, 'cause you've been so good to me. I'll never forget the little kid's givin' me the coat off his own back, if I live to be a hundred. Now don't blab on me, or the boss would nearly kill me."

"Is that man your father?" began Keith, but Jonesy, alarmed by some sudden noise, sprang to the door, and disappeared in the twilight.

The boys looked at each other a moment, with surprise and indignation in their faces. There was a hurried consultation in the haymow. A few moments later the boys were smuggling their new pet into the house, and up the back stairs. They scarcely dared breathe until it was safe in their own room.

All the time that they were dressing for the party, they were trying to decide where to put it for the night, so that neither the tramp nor the family could discover it. What Jonesy had told them about the man's dishonest intention did not relieve them from their promise. They were amazed that any one could be so mean, and longed to tell their Aunt Allison all about it; still, one of the conditions on which they had bought the bear was that they were to "keep mum," and they stuck strictly to that promise.

By the time they were dressed, they had decided to put it in the blue room, a guest-

"There was a hurried consultation in the hay-mow"

chamber in the north wing, seldom used in winter, because it was so hard to heat. "Nobody will ever think of coming in here," said Malcolm, "and it will be plenty warm for a bear if we turn on the furnace a little." As he spoke, he was tying the bear's rope around a leg of the big, high-posted bed.

"Won't Ginger be surprised?" answered Keith. "We'll tell her that we have a valentine six feet long, and keep her guessing."

There was no time for teasing, however, as the first guest arrived while they were still in the blue room.

"I hate to go off and leave him in the dark," said Keith, with a final loving pat. "I guess he'll not mind, though. Maybe he'll think he is in the woods if I put this good-smelling pine pillow on the rug beside him."

"Oh, boys," called Virginia from the hall down-stairs. "See what an enormous valentine pie Aunt Allison has made!"

Looking over the banisters, the boys saw that a table had been drawn into the middle of the wide reception-hall, and on it sat the largest pie that they had ever seen. It was in a bright new tin pan, and its daintily browned crust would have made them hungry even if their appetites had not been sharpened by the cold and exercise of the afternoon.

"What a queer place to serve pie," said Malcolm, in a disapproving undertone to his brother. "Why don't they have it in the dining-room? It looks mighty good, but somehow it doesn't seem proper to have it stuck out here in the hall. Mamma would never do such a thing."

"Aw, it's made of paper! She fooled us, sure, Malcolm," called back Keith, who had run on ahead to look. "It is only painted to look like a pie. But isn't it a splendid imitation?"

Virginia, pleased to have caught them so

cleverly, showed them the ends of twenty-four pieces of narrow ribbon, peeping from under the delicately brown top crust. "The white ones are for the girls, and the red ones for the boys," she explained. "There is a valentine on the end of each one, and those on the red ribbons match the ones on the white. We'll all pull at once, and the ones who have valentines alike will go out to dinner together."

The guests came promptly. They had been invited for half-past six, and dinner was to be served soon after that time. The last to arrive was the Little Colonel. She came in charge of an old coloured woman, Mom Beck, who had been her mother's nurse as well as her own. The child was so hidden in her wraps when Mom Beck led her up-stairs, that no one could tell how she looked. The boys had been curious to see her, ever since they had heard so many tales of her mischievous pranks. A few minutes

later, when she appeared in the parlours, there was a buzz of admiration. Maybe it was not so much for the soft light hair, the star-like beauty of her big dark eyes, or the delicate colour in her cheeks that made them as pink as a wild rose, as it was for the valentine costume she wore. It was of dainty white tulle, sprinkled with hundreds of tiny red velvet hearts, and there was a coronet of glittering rhinestones on her long fair hair.

"The Queen of Hearts," announced Aunt Allison, leading her forward. "You know 'she made some tarts, upon a summer day,' and now she shall open the valentine pie and see if it is as good as her Majesty's."

The big music-box in the hall began playing one of its liveliest waltzes, the children gathered around the great pie, and twenty-four little hands reached out to grasp the floating ends of ribbon.

"Pull!" cried the little Queen of Hearts. The paper crust flew off, and twenty-four

yards of ribbon, each with a valentine attached, fluttered brightly through the air for an instant.

"Now match your verses," cried her Majesty again, opening her own to read what was in it. There was much laughing and peeping over shoulders, and tangling of white and scarlet ribbons, while the gay music-box played on.

In the midst of it Virginia beckoned to the Little Colonel. "Come up-stairs with me for a minute, Lloyd," she whispered, "and help me look for something. Aunt Allison has forgotten where she put the box of arrows that we are to use in the archery contest after dinner. There is the prettiest prize for the one who hits the red heart in the centre of the target."

"Oh, do you suppose you can hit it?" asked Lloyd, as she and Virginia slipped their arms around each other, and went skipping up the stairs.

"Yes, indeed!" answered Virginia. "I used to practise so much with my Indian bow and arrow out at the fort, that I could hit centre nearly every time. I am not going to shoot to-night. Aunt Allison thinks it wouldn't be fair."

When they reached the top of the stairs, Virginia went into her room to light a wax taper in one of the tall silver candlesticks on her dressing-table. "I think that Aunt Allison must have left those arrows in the blue room," she said, leading the way down the cross hall which went to the north wing. "She made the pie in there this morning, and all the other things were there. Nobody comes over in this part of the house much in winter, unless there happens to be a great deal of company."

The taper that Virginia carried was the only light in that part of the house. When she reached the door of the blue room she turned to Lloyd. "Hold the candle for

me, please," she said, "while I look in the closet."

It was a pretty picture that the little "Queen of Hearts" made, as she stood in the doorway, with the tall silver candlestick held high in both hands. Her hair shone like gold in the candle-light, and her glittering crown flashed as if a circle of fairy fireflies had been caught in its soft meshes. Her dark eyes peered anxiously around the big shadowy room, lighted only by her flickering taper.

Down-stairs, Malcolm and Keith were almost quarrelling about her. It began by Malcolm taking his brother aside and offering to trade valentines with him.

"Why?" asked Keith, suspiciously.

"'Cause yours matches the Little Colonel's, and I want to take her out to dinner," admitted Malcolm. "She is the prettiest girl here."

"But I don't want to trade," answered Keith. "I want to take her myself."

"I'll give you the pick of any six stamps in my album if you will."

"Don't want your old stamps," declared Keith, stoutly. "I'd rather have the Little Colonel for my partner."

"I think you might trade," coaxed Malcolm. "It's mean not to when I'm the oldest. I'll give you that Chinese puzzle you've been wanting so long if you will." Keith shook his head.

Just then a terrific scream sounded in the upper hall, followed by another that made every one down-stairs turn pale with fright. Two voices were uttering piercing shrieks, one after another, so loud and frantic that even the servants in the back part of the house came running. Miss Allison, thinking of the candle she had told Virginia to light, and remembering the thin, white dress the child wore, instantly thought she must have set herself afire. She ran into the hall, so frightened that she was trembling from

head to foot. Before she could reach the staircase, Virginia came flying down the steps, white as a little ghost, and her eyes wide with terror. Throwing herself into her aunt's outstretched arms, she began to sob out her story between great, trembling gasps.

"Oh, there's an awful, awful wild beast in the blue room, nearly as tall as the ceiling! It rose up and came after us out of the corner, and if I hadn't slammed the door just in time, it would have eaten us up. I'm sure it would! Oo-oo-oo! It was so awful!" she wailed.

"Why, Virginia," exclaimed her aunt, distressed to see her so terrified, "it must have been only a big shadow you saw. It isn't possible for a wild beast to be in the blue room, you know. Where is Lloyd?"

"She's up heah, Miss Allison," called Mom Beck's voice. "She's so skeered, I'se pow'ful 'fraid she gwine to faint. They sut'nly is something in that room, honey, deed they is.

I kin heah it movin' around now, switchin' he's tail an' growlin'!"

Malcolm and Keith, with guilty faces, went dashing up the stairs, and the whole party followed them at a respectful distance. When they opened the door the room looked very big and shadowy, and the bear, roused from its nap, was standing on its hind legs beside the high-posted bed. The huge figure was certainly enough to frighten any one coming upon it unexpectedly in the dark, and when Miss Allison saw it she drew Virginia's trembling hand into hers with a sympathetic clasp. Before she could ask any questions, the boys began an excited explanation. It was some time before they could make their story understood.

Their grandmother was horrified, and insisted on sending the animal away at once. "The idea of bringing such a dangerous creature into any one's house," she exclaimed, "and, above all, of shutting him

up in a bedroom! We might have all been bitten, or hugged to death!"

"But, grandmother," begged Malcolm, "he isn't dangerous. Let me bring him into the light, and show you what a kind old pet he is."

There was a scattering to the other end of the hall as Malcolm came out, leading the bear, but the children gradually drew nearer as the great animal began its performances. Keith whistled and kept time with his feet in a funny little shuffling jig he had learned from Jonesy, and the bear obligingly went through all his tricks. He was used to being pulled out to perform whenever a crowd could be collected.

Virginia forgot her fear of him when he stood up and presented arms like a real soldier, and even went up and patted him when the show was over, joining with the boys in begging that he might be allowed to stay in the house until morning. Mrs.

MacIntyre was determined to send a man down to the cabin at once to investigate. She had a horror of tramps. But the boys begged her to wait until daylight for Jonesy's sake.

"The man will beat him if he finds out that Jonesy warned us," pleaded Keith. He was so earnest that the tears stood in his big, trustful eyes.

"This is spoiling the party, mother," whispered Miss Allison, "and dinner is waiting. I'll be responsible for any harm that may be done if you will let the boys have their way this once."

There seemed no other way to settle it just then, so Bruin was allowed to go back to his rug in the blue room, and the door was securely locked.

Keith took Lloyd down to dinner, and his grandmother heard him apologising all the way down for having frightened her. The little Queen of Hearts listened smilingly, but

her colour did not come back all evening, until after the archery contest. It was when Malcolm came up with the prize he had won, a tiny silver arrow, and pinned it in the knot of red ribbon on her shoulder.

"Will you keep it to remember me by?" he asked, bashfully.

"Of co'se!" she answered, with a smile that showed all her roguish dimples. "I'll keep it fo'evah and evah to remembah how neah I came to bein' eaten up by yo' bea'h."

"It seems too bad for such a beautiful party to come to an end," Sally Fairfax said when the last merry game was played, the last story told, and it was time to go home. "But there's one comfort," she added, gathering all her gay valentines together, "there needn't be any end to the remembering of it. I've had such a good time, Mrs. MacIntyre."

It was so late when the last carriage rolled down the avenue, bearing away the last smiling little guest, that the children were

almost too sleepy to undress. It was not long until the last light was put out in every room, and a deep stillness settled over the entire house. One by one the lights went out in every home in the valley, and only the stars were left shining, in the cold wintry sky. No, there was one lamp that still burned. It was in the little cottage where old Professor Heinrich sat bowed over his books.

CHAPTER IV

A FIRE AND A PLAN

OME people said that old Johann Heinrich never slept, for no matter what hour of the night one passed his lonely little house, a lamp was always burning. He was a queer old German naturalist, living by himself in a cottage adjoining the MacIntyre place. He had been a professor in a large university until he grew too old to keep his position. Why he should have chosen Lloydsborough Valley as the place to settle for the remainder of his life, no one could tell.

He kept himself away from his neighbours, and spent so much time roaming around the woods by himself that people called him queer. They did not know that he had written two big books about the birds and insects he loved so well, or that he could tell them facts more wonderful than fairy tales about these little wild creatures of the woodland.

To-night he had read later than usual, and his fire was nearly out. He was too poor to keep a servant, so when he found that the coalhod was empty he had to go out to the kitchen to fill it himself. That is why he saw something that happened soon after midnight, while everybody else in the valley was sound asleep.

Over in the cabin by the spring-house where the boys had left the tramp and Jonesy, a puff of smoke went curling around the roof. Then a tongue of flame shot up through the cedars, and another and another

until the sky was red with an angry glare. It lighted up the eastern window-panes of the servants' cottage, but the inmates, tired from the unusual serving of the evening before, slept on. It shone full across the window of Virginia's room, but she was dreaming of being chased by bears, and only turned uneasily in her sleep.

The old professor, on his way to the kitchen, noticed that it seemed strangely light outside. He shuffled to the door and looked out.

"Ach Himmel!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "Somebody vill shust in his bed be burnt, if old Johann does not haste make!"

Not waiting to close the door behind him, or even to catch up something to protect his old bald head from the intense cold of the winter night, he ran out across the garden. His shuffling feet, in their flapping old carpet slippers, forgot their rheumatism, and his shoulders dropped the weight of their seventy

years. He ran like a boy across the meadow, through the gap in the fence, and down the hill to the cabin by the spring.

All one side of it was in flames. The fire was curling around the front door and bursting through the windows with fierce cracklings. Dashing frantically around to the back door, he threw himself against it, shouting to know if any one was within. A blinding rush of smoke was his only answer as he backed away from the overpowering heat, but something fell across the door-sill in a limp little heap. It was Jonesy.

Dragging the child to a safe distance from the burning building, he ran back, fearing that some one else might be in danger, but this time the flames met him at the door, and it was impossible to go in. His hoarse shouting roused the servants, but by the time they reached the cabin the roof had fallen in, and all danger of the fire spreading to the other buildings was over.

While the professor was bending over Jonesy, trying to bring him back to consciousness, Miss Allison came running down the path. She had an eiderdown quilt wrapped around her over her dressing-gown. The shouts had awakened her, also, and she had slipped out as quietly as possible, not wishing to alarm her mother.

"How did it happen?" she demanded, breathlessly. "Is the child badly burned? Is any one else hurt? Is the tramp in the cabin?"

No one gave any answer to her rapid questions. The old professor shook his head, but did not look up. He was bending over Jonesy, trying to restore him to consciousness. He seemed to know the right things to do for him, and in a little while the child opened his eyes and looked around wonderingly. In a few minutes he was able to tell what he knew about the fire.

It was not much, only a horrible recollec-

tion of being awakened by a feeling that he was choking in the thick smoke that filled the room; of hearing the boss swear at him to be quick and follow him or he would be burned to death. Then there had been an awful moment of groping through the blinding, choking smoke, trying to find a way out. The man sprang to a window and made his escape, but as the outside air rushed in through the opening he left, it seemed to fan the smoke instantly into flame.

Jonesy had struck out at the wall of fire with his helpless little hands, and then, half-crazed by the scorching pain, dropped to the floor and crawled in the opposite direction, just as the professor burst open the door.

The sight of the poor little blistered face brought the tears to Miss Allison's eyes, and she called two of the coloured men, directing them to carry Jonesy to the house, and then go at once for a doctor. But the professor interfered, insisting that Jonesy should be

taken to his house. He said that he knew how to prepare the cooling bandages that were needed, and that he would sit up all night to apply them. He could not sleep anyhow, he said, after such great excitement.

"But I feel responsible for him," urged Miss Allison. "Since it happened on our place, and my little nephews brought him here, it seems to me that we ought to have the care of him."

The professor waved her aside, lifting Jonesy's head as tenderly as a nurse could have done, and motioned the coloured men to lift him up.

"No, no, fraulein," he said. "I have had eggsperience. It is besser the poor leedle knabe go mit me!"

There was no opposing the old man's masterful way. Miss Allison stepped aside for them to pass, calling after him her willingness to do the nursing he had taken upon

himself, and insisting that she would come early in the morning to help.

Unc' Henry was left to guard the ruins, lest some stray spark should be blown toward the other buildings. "Dis yere ole niggah wa'n't mistaken aftah all," he muttered. "Dee was somebody prowlin' 'roun' de premises yistiddy evenin'." Then he searched the ground, all around the cabin, for footprints in the snow. He found some tracks presently, and followed them over the meadow in the starlight, across the road, and down the railroad track several rods. There they suddenly disappeared. The tramp had evidently walked on the rail some distance. If Unc' Henry had gone quarter of a mile farther up the track, he would have found those same sliding imprints on every other crosstie, as if the man had taken long running leaps in his haste to get away.

Jonesy stoutly denied that the man had

set fire to the cabin. "We nearly froze to death that night," he said, when questioned about it afterward, "and the boss piled on an awful big lot of wood just before he went to bed."

"Then what made him take to his heels so fast if he didn't?" some one asked.

"I don't know," answered Jonesy. "He said that luck was always against him, and maybe he thought nobody would believe him if he did say that he didn't do it."

Several days after that Malcolm found the tramp's picture in the "Courier-Journal." He was a noted criminal who had escaped from a Northern penitentiary some two months before, and had been arrested by the Louisville police. There was no mistaking him. That big, ugly scar branded him on cheek and forehead like another Cain.

"And to think that that terrible man was harboured on my place!" exclaimed Mrs.

MacIntyre when she heard of it. "And you boys were down there in the cabin with him for hours! Sat beside him and talked with him! What will your mother say? I feel as if you had been exposed to the smallpox, and I cannot be too thankful now that the boy who was with him was not brought here. He isn't a fit companion for you. Not that the poor little unfortunate is to blame. He cannot help being a child of the slums, and he must be put in an orphan asylum or a reform school at once. It is probably the only thing that can save him from growing up to be a criminal like the man who brought him here. I shall see what can be done about it, as soon as possible."

"A child of the slums!" Malcolm and Keith repeated the expression afterward, with only a vague idea of its meaning. It seemed to set poor Jonesy apart from themselves as something unclean, — something

that their happy, well-filled lives must not be allowed to touch.

Maybe if Jonesy had been an attractive child, with a sensitive mouth, and big, appealing eyes, he might have found his way more easily into people's hearts. But he was a lean, snub-nosed little fellow, with a freckled face and neglected hair. No one would ever find his cheek a tempting one to kiss, and no one would be moved, by any feeling save pity, to stoop and put affectionate arms around Jonesy. He was only a common little street gamin, as unlovely as he was unloved.

"What a blessing that there are such places as orphan asylums for children of that class," said Mrs. MacIntyre, after one of her visits to him. "I must make arrangements for him to be put into one as soon as he is able to be moved."

"I think he will be very loath to leave the old professor," answered Miss Allison. "He

has been so good to the child, amusing him by the hour with his microscopes and collections of insects, telling him those delightful old German folk-lore tales, and putting him to sleep every night to the music of his violin. What a child-lover he is, and what a delightful old man in every way! I am glad we have discovered him."

"Yes," said Mrs. MacIntyre; "and when this little tramp is sent away, I want the children to go there often. I asked him if he could not teach them this spring, at least make a beginning with them in natural history, and he appeared much pleased. He is as poor as a church mouse, and would be very glad of the money."

"That reminds me," said Miss Allison, "he asked me if the boys could not come down to see Jonesy this afternoon, and bring the bear. He thought it would give the little fellow so much pleasure, and might help him to forget his suffering."

Mrs. MacIntyre hesitated. "I do not believe their mother would like it," she answered. "Sydney is careful enough about their associates, but Elise is doubly particular. You can imagine how much badness this child must know when you remember how he has been reared. He told me that his name is Jones Carter, and that he cannot remember ever having a father or a mother. I questioned him very closely this morning. He comes from the worst of the Chicago slums. He slept in the cellar of one of its poorest tenement houses, and lived in the gutters. He has a brother only a little older, who is a bootblack. On days when shines are plentiful they had something to eat, otherwise they starved or begged."

"Poor little lamb," murmured Miss Allison.

"It was by the brother's advice he came away with that tramp," continued Mrs. MacIntyre. "He had gotten possession of that

trained bear in some way, and probably took a fancy to Jones because he could whistle and dance all sorts of jigs. He probably thought it would be a good thing to have a child with him to work on people's sympathies. They walked all the way from Chicago to Lloydsborough, Jones told me, excepting three days' journey they made in a wagon. They have been two months on the road, and showed the bear in the country places they passed through. They avoided the large towns."

"Think what a Christmas he must have had!" exclaimed Miss Allison.

"Christmas! I doubt if he ever heard the word. His speech is something shocking; nothing but the slang of the streets, and so ungrammatical that I could scarcely understand him at times. No, I am very sure that neither Sydney nor Elise would want the boys to be with him."

"But he is so little, mother, and so sick

and pitiful looking," pleaded Miss Allison. "Surely he cannot know so very much badness or hurt the boys if they go down to cheer him up for a little while."

Notwithstanding Mrs. MacIntyre's fears, she consented to the boys visiting Jonesy that afternoon. She could not resist the professor's second appeal or the boys' own urging.

They took the bear with them, which Jonesy welcomed like a lost friend. They spent an interesting hour among the professor's collections, listening to his explanations in his funny broken English. Then they explored his cottage, much amused by his queer housekeeping, cracked nuts on the hearth, and roasted apples on a string in front of the fire.

Jonesy did not seem to be cheered up by the visit as much as the professor had expected. Presently the old man left the room and Keith sat down on the side of the bed.

"What makes you so still, Jonesy?" he asked. "You haven't said a word for the last half hour."

"I was thinking about Barney," he answered, keeping his face turned away. "Barney is my brother, you know."

"Yes, so grandmother said," answered Keith. "How big is he?"

"'Bout as big as yourn." There was a choke in Jonesy's voice now. "Seein' yourn put his arm across your shoulder and pullin' your head back by one ear and pinchin' you sort in fun like, made me think the way Barney uster do to me."

Keith did not know what to say, so there was a long, awkward pause.

"I'd never a-left him," said Jonesy, "but the boss said it 'ud only be a little while and we'd make so much money showin' the bear that I'd have a whole pile to take home. I could ride back on the cars and take a whole trunk full of nice things to Barney, —

clothes, and candy, and a swell watch and chain, and a bustin' beauty of a bike. Now the bear's sold and the boss has run away, and I don't know how I can get back to Barney. Him an me's all each other's got, and I want to see him so bad."

The little fellow's lip quivered, and he put up one bandaged hand to wipe away the hot tears that would keep coming, in spite of his efforts not to make a baby of himself. There was something so pitiful in the gesture that Keith looked across at Malcolm and then patted the bedclothes with an affectionate little hand.

"Never mind, Jonesy," he said, "papa will be home in the spring and he'll send you back to Barney." But Jonesy never having known anything of fathers whose chief pleasure is in spending money to make little sons happy, was not comforted by that promise as much as Keith thought he ought to be.

"But I won't be here then," he sobbed.

"They're goin' to put me in a 'sylum, and I can't get out for so long that maybe Barney will be dead before we ever find each other again."

He was crying violently now.

"Who is going to put you in an asylum?" asked Malcolm, lifting an end of the pillow under which Jonesy's head had burrowed, to hide the grief that his eight-year-old manhood made him too proud to show.

"An old lady with white hair what comes here every day. The professor said he would keep me if he wasn't so old and hard up, and she said as how a 'sylum was the proper place for a child of the slums, and he said yes, if they wasn't nobody to care for 'em. But I've got somebody!" he cried. "I've got Barney! Oh, don't let them shut me up somewhere so I can't never get back to Barney!"

"They don't shut you up when they send you to an asylum," said Malcolm. "The

one near here is a lovely big house, with acres of green grass around it, and orchards and vineyards, and they are ever so good to the children, and give them plenty to eat and wear, and send them to school."

"Barney wouldn't be there," sobbed Jonesy, diving under the pillow again. "I don't want nothing but him."

"Well, we'll see what we can do," said Malcolm, as he heard the professor coming back. "If we could only keep you here until spring, I am sure that papa would send you back all right. He's always helping people that get into trouble."

Jonesy took his little snub nose out of the pillow as the professor came in, and looked around defiantly as if ready to fight the first one who dared to hint that he had been crying. The boys took their leave soon after, leading the bear back to his new quarters in the carriage house, where they had made him a comfortable den. Then they

walked slowly up to the house, their arms thrown across each other's shoulders.

"S'pose it was us," said Keith, after walking on a little way in silence. "S'pose that you and I were left of all the family, and didn't have any friends in the world, and I was to get separated from you and couldn't get back?"

"That would be tough luck, for sure," answered Malcolm.

"Don't you s'pose Jonesy feels as badly about it as we would?" asked Keith.

"Shouldn't be surprised," said Malcolm, beginning to whistle. Keith joined in, and keeping step to the tune, like two soldiers, they marched on into the house.

Virginia found them in the library, a little while later, sitting on the hearth-rug, tailor-fashion. They were still talking about Jonesy. They could think of nothing else but the loneliness of the little waif, and his pitiful appeal: "Oh, don't let them shut

me up where I can't never get back to Barney."

"Why don't you write to your father?" asked Virginia, when they had told her the story of their visit.

"Oh, it is so hard to explain things in a letter," answered Malcolm, "and being off there, he'd say that grandmother and all the grown people certainly know best. But if he could see Jonesy, — how pitiful looking he is, and hear him crying to go back to his brother, I know he'd feel the way we do about it."

"I called the professor out in the hall, and told him so," said Keith, "and asked him if he couldn't adopt Jonesy, or something, until papa comes home. But he said that he is too poor. He has only a few dollars a month to live on. I didn't mind asking him. He smiled in that big, kind way he always does. He said Jonesy was lots of company, and he would like to keep him

this summer, if he could afford it, and let him get well and strong out here in the country."

"Then he would keep him till Uncle Sydney comes, if somebody would pay his board?" asked Virginia.

"Yes," said Malcolm, "but that doesn't help matters much, for we children are the only ones who want him to stay, and our monthly allowances, all put together, wouldn't be enough."

"We might earn the money ourselves," suggested Virginia, after awhile, breaking a long silence.

"How?" demanded Malcolm. "Now, Ginger, you know, as well as I do, there is no way for us to earn anything this time of year. You can't pick fruit in the dead of winter, can you? or pull weeds, or rake leaves? What other way is there?"

"We might go to every house in the valley, and exhibit the bear," said Keith, "taking up a collection each time."

"Now you've made me think of it," cried Virginia, excitedly. "I've thought of a good way. We'll give Jonesy a benefit, like great singers have. The bear will be the star performer, and we'll all act, too, and sell the tickets, and have tableaux. I love to arrange tableaux. We were always having them out at the fort."

"I bid to show off the bear," cried Malcolm, entering into Virginia's plan at once. "Maybe I'll learn something to recite, too."

"I'll help print the tickets," said Keith, "and go around selling them, and be in anything you want me to be. How many tableaux are you going to have, Ginger?"

"I can't tell yet," she answered, but a moment after she cried out, her eyes shining with pleasure, "Oh, I've thought of a lovely one. We can have the Little Colonel and the bear for 'Beauty and the Beast.'"

Malcolm promptly turned a somersault on

the rug to express his approval, but came up, with a grave face, saying, "I'll bet that grandmother will say we can't have it."

"Let's get Aunt Allison on our side," suggested Virginia. "She's up in her room now, painting a picture."

A little sigh of disappointment escaped Miss Allison's lips, as she heard the rush of feet on the stairs. This was the first time that she had touched her brushes since the children's coming, and she had hoped that this one afternoon would be free from interruption, when she heard them planning their afternoon's occupations at the lunch-table. They had come back before the little water-colour sketch she was making was quite finished.

There was no disappointment, however, in the bright face she turned toward them, and Virginia lost no time in beginning her story. She had been elected to tell it, but before it was done all three had had a part

in the telling, and all three were waiting with wistful eyes for her answer.

"Well, what is it you want me to do?" she asked, finally.

"Oh, just be on our side!" they exclaimed, "and get grandmother to say yes. You see she doesn't feel about Jonesy the way we do. She is willing to pay a great deal of money to have him taken off and cared for, but she says she doesn't see how grandchildren of hers can be so interested in a little tramp that comes from nobody knows where, and who will probably end his days in a penitentiary."

Aunt Allison answered Malcolm's last remark a little sternly. "You must understand that it is only for your own good that she is opposed to Jonesy's staying," she said. "There is nobody in the valley so generous and kind to the poor as your grandmother."

"Yes'm," said Virginia, meekly, "but you'll ask her, won't you please, auntie?"

Miss Allison smiled at her persistence. "Wait until I finish this," she said. "Then I'll go down-stairs and put the matter before her, and report to you at dinner-time. Now are you satisfied?"

"Yes," they cried in chorus, "you're on our side. It's all right now!" With a series of hearty hugs that left her almost breathless, they hurried away.

When Miss Allison kept her promise she did not go to her mother with the children's story of Jonesy, to move her to pity. She told her simply what they wanted, and then said, "Mother, you know I have begun to teach the children the 'Vision of Sir Launfal.' Virginia has learned every word of it, and the boys will soon know all but the preludes. There will never be a better chance than this for them to learn the lesson:

> "'Not what we give, but what we share,
> For the gift without the giver is bare.'

"This would be a real sharing of them-

selves, all their time and best energies, for they will have to work hard to get up such an entertainment as this. It isn't for Jonesy's sake I ask it, but for the children's own good."

The old lady looked thoughtfully into the fire a moment, and then said, "Maybe you are right, Allison. I do want to keep them unspotted from a knowledge of the world's evils, but I do not want to make them selfish. If this little beggar at the gate can teach them where to find the Holy Grail, through unselfish service to him, I do not want to stand in the way. Bless their little hearts, they may play Sir Launfal if they want to, and may they have as beautiful a vision as his!"

CHAPTER V

JONESY'S BENEFIT

THE Jonesy Benefit grew like Jack's beanstalk after Miss Allison took charge of it. There was less than a week in which to get ready, as the boys insisted on having it on the twenty-second of February, in honour of Washington's birthday; but in that short time the childish show which Ginger had proposed grew into an entertainment so beautiful and elaborate that the neighbourhood talked of it for weeks after.

Miss Allison spent one sleepless night, planning her campaign like a general, and

next morning had an army of helpers at work. Before the day was over she sent a letter to an old school friend of hers in the city, Miss Eleanor Bond, who had been her most intimate companion all through her school-days, and who still spent a part of every summer with her.

"Dearest Nell," the letter said, "come out to-morrow on the first afternoon train, if you love me. The children are getting up an entertainment for charity, which shall be duly explained on your arrival. No time now. I am superintending a force of carpenters in the college hall, where the entertainment is to take place, have two seamstresses in the house hurrying up costumes, and am helping mother scour the country for pretty children to put in the tableaux.

"The house is like an ant-hill in commotion, there is so much scurrying around; but I know that is what you thoroughly enjoy. You shall have a finger in every pie if you

will come out and help me to make this a never-to-be-forgotten occasion.

"I want to make the old days of chivalry live again for Virginia and Malcolm and Keith. I am going back to King Arthur's Court for the flower of knighthood at his round table. Come and read for us between tableaux as only you can do. Be the interpreter of 'Sir Launfal's Vision' and the 'Idylls of the King.' Give us the benefit of your talent for sweet charity's sake, if not for the sake of 'auld lang syne' and your devoted ALLISON."

"She'll be here," said Miss Allison, as she sealed the letter, nodding confidently to Mrs. Sherman, who had come over to help with Lloyd's costume. "You remember Nell Bond, do you not? She took the prize every year in elocution, and was always in demand at every entertainment. She is the most charming reader I ever heard, and as for story-telling — well, she's better than the

'Arabian Nights.' You must let the Little Colonel come over every evening while she is here."

Miss Bond arrived the next day, and her visit was a time of continual delight to the children. They followed her wherever she went, until Mrs. MacIntyre laughingly called her the 'Pied Piper of Hamelin,' and asked what she had done to bewitch them.

The first night they gathered around the library-table, all as busy as bees. Keith and the Little Colonel were cutting tinsel into various lengths for Virginia to tie into fringe for a gay banner. Malcolm was gilding some old spurs, Mrs. MacIntyre sat stringing yards of wax beads, that gleamed softly in the lamplight like great ropes of pearls, and Mrs. Sherman was painting the posters, which were to be put up in the post-office and depot as advertisements of the Jonesy Benefit.

Miss Allison, who had been busy for hours with pasteboard and glue, tin-foil and scis-

sors, held up the suit of mail which she had just finished.

"Isn't that fine!" cried Malcolm. "It looks exactly like some of the armour we saw in the Tower of London, doesn't it, Keith?"

"I've thought of a riddle!" exclaimed Virginia. "Why is Aunt Allison's head like Aladdin's lamp?"

"'Cause it's so bright?" ventured Malcolm.

"No; because she has only to rub it, and everything she thinks of appears. I don't see how it is possible to make so many beautiful things out of almost nothing."

Virginia looked admiringly around at all the pretty articles scattered over the room. A helmet with nodding white plumes lay on the piano. A queen's robe trailed its royal ermine beside it. A sword with a jewelled hilt shone on the mantel, and a dozen dazzling shields were ranged in various places on the low book-shelves.

It was easy, in the midst of such surroundings, for the children to imagine themselves back in the days of King Arthur and his court, while Miss Bond sat there telling them such beautiful tales of its fair ladies and noble knights. Indeed, before the day of the entertainment came around they even found themselves talking to each other in the quaint speech of that olden time.

When Malcolm accidentally ran against his grandmother in the hall, instead of his usual, "Oh, excuse me, grandmother," it was "Prithee grant me gracious pardon, fair dame. Not for a king's ransom would I have thus jostled thee in such unseemly haste!" And Ginger, instead of giving Keith a slap when he teasingly penned her up in a corner, to make her divide some nuts with him, said, in a most tragic way, "Unhand me, villain, or by my troth thou'lt rue this ruffian conduct sore!"

The library-table was strewn with books

of old court life, and pictures of kings and queens whose costumes were to be copied in the tableaux. There was one book which Keith carried around with him until he had spelled out the whole beautiful tale. It was called "In Kings' Houses," and was the story of the little Duke of Gloster who was made a knight in his boyhood. And when Keith had read it himself, he took it down to the professor's, and read it all over again to Jonesy.

"Think how grand he must have looked, Jonesy," cried Keith, "and I am to be dressed exactly like him when I am knighted in the tableau." Then he read the description again:

"'A suit of white velvet embroidered with seed pearls, and literally blazing with jewels, — even the buttons being great brilliants. From his shoulder hung a cloak of azure blue velvet, the colour of the order, richly wrought with gold; and around his neck he

wore the magnificent collar and jewel of St. George and the Dragon, that was the personal gift of his Majesty, the king.'

"Think how splendid it must have been, Jonesy, when the procession came in to the music of trumpets and bugles and silver flutes and hautboys! Wouldn't you like to have seen the heralds marching by, two by two, in cloth of gold, with an escort of the queen's guard following? All of England's best and bravest were there, and they sat in the carven stalls in St. George's Chapel, with their gorgeous banners drooping over them. I saw that chapel, Jonesy, when we were in England, and I saw where the knights kept the 'vigil of arms' in the holy places, the night before they took their vows." He picked up the book and read again: "'Fasting and praying and lonely watching by night in the great abbey where there are so many dead folk.'

"Oh, don't you wish you could have lived

in those days, Jonesy, and have been a knight?"

It was all Greek to Jonesy. The terms puzzled him, but he enjoyed Keith's description of the tournaments.

Several evenings after that, Keith went down to the cottage dressed in the beautiful velvet costume of white and blue, ablaze with rhinestones and glittering jewels. He had been wrapped in his Aunt Allison's golf cape, and, as he threw it off, Jonesy's eyes opened wider and wider with wonder.

"Hi! You look like a whole jeweller's window!" he cried, dazzled by the gorgeous sight. The professor lighted another lamp, and Keith turned slowly around, to be admired on every side like a pleased peacock.

"Of course it's all only imitation," he explained, "but it will look just as good as the real thing behind the footlights. But you ought to see the stage when it's fixed up to look like the Hall of the Shields, if you

want to see glitter. It's be-yu-tiful! Like the one at Camelot, you know."

But Jonesy did not know, and Keith had to tell about that old castle at Camelot, as Miss Bond had told him. How that down the side of the long hall ran a treble range of shields, —

> "And under every shield a knight was named,
> For such was Arthur's custom in his hall.
> When some good knight had done one noble deed
> His arms were carven only, but if twain
> His arms were blazoned also, but if none
> The shield was blank and bare, without a sign,
> Saving the name beneath."

Keith had been greatly interested in watching the carpenters fix the stage so that it could be made to look like the Hall of the Shields in a very few moments, when the time for that tableau should come. He knew where every glittering shield was to hang, and every banner and battle-axe.

"How do you suppose those knights felt," he said to Jonesy, "who saw their shields

hanging there year after year, blank and bare, because they had never done even one noble deed? They must have been dreadfully ashamed when the king walked by and read their names underneath, and then looked up at the shields and saw nothing emblazoned on them or even carved. Seems to me that I would have done something to have made me worthy of that honour if I had died for it!"

Something, — it may have been the soft, rich colour of the jewel-broidered velvet the boy wore, or maybe the flush that rose to his cheeks at the thrill of such noble thoughts, — something had brought an unusual beauty into his face. As he stood there, with head held high, his dark eyes flashing, his face glowing, and in that princely dress of a bygone day, he looked every inch a nobleman. There was something so pure and sweet, too, in the expression of his upturned face that the light upon it

seemed to touch it into an almost unearthly fairness.

The professor, who had been watching him with a tender smile on his rugged old face, drew the child toward him, and brushed the hair back on his forehead.

"Ach, liebchen," he said, in his queer broken speech, "thy shield will never be blank and bare. Already thou hast blazoned it with the beauty of a noble purpose, and like Galahad, thou too shalt find the Grail."

It was Keith's turn to be puzzled, but he did not like to ask for an explanation; there was something so solemn in the way the old man put his hand on his head as he spoke, almost as if he were bestowing a blessing. Besides, it was time to go to the rehearsal at the college. One of the servants had come to stay with Jonesy while the professor went over to practise on his violin. He was to play behind the scenes, a soft, low accompaniment to Miss Bond's reading.

By eight o'clock, the night of the Benefit, every seat in the house was full. "That's jolly for Jonesy," exclaimed Malcolm, peeping out from behind the curtain. "We counted up that ten cents a ticket would make enough, if they were all sold, to pay his board till papa comes home, and buy him all the new clothes he needs, too. Now every ticket is sold."

"Hurry up, Malcolm," called Keith. "We are first on the programme, and it is time to begin."

There was a great bustle behind the scenes for a few minutes, and then "Beauty and the Beast" was announced. When the Little Colonel came on the stage leading the great bear, such a cheering and clapping began that they both looked around, half frightened; but the boys followed immediately and the Little Colonel, dressed as a flower girl, danced out to meet Keith, who came in clicking his castanets in time to

"It was really a beautiful picture be made"

Malcolm's whistling. The bear was made to go through all his tricks and his soldier drill.

The children in the audience stood on tip-toe in their eagerness to see the great animal perform, and were so wild in their applause that the boys begged to be allowed to take it in front of the curtain every time during the evening when there was a long pause while some tableau was being prepared.

Over the rustle of fluttering programmes and the hum of conversation that followed the first number, there fell presently the soft, sweet notes of the professor's violin, and Miss Bond's musical voice began the story of the Vision of Sir Launfal.

> "My golden spurs now bring to me,
> And bring to me my richest mail,
> For to-morrow I go over land and sea
> In search of the Holy Grail."

Here the curtains were drawn apart to show Malcolm seated on his pony as Sir Launfal, "in his gilded mail that flamed so bright." It was really a beautiful picture

he made, and his grandmother, leaning forward, her face beaming with pride at the boy's noble bearing, compared him with Arthur himself, "with lance in rest, from spur to plume a star of tournament."

The next tableau showed him spurning the leper at his gate, and turning away in disgust from the beggar who "seemed the one blot on the summer morn." How Miss Bond's voice rang out when "the leper raised not the gold from the dust."

> "Better to me the poor man's crust.
> That is no true alms which the hand can hold.
> He gives nothing but worthless gold
> Who gives from a sense of duty."

In the next tableau it was "as an old bent man, worn-out and frail," that Sir Launfal came back from his weary pilgrimage. He had not found the Holy Grail, but through his own sufferings he had learned pity for all pain and poverty. Once more he stood beside the leper at his castle gate, but this

time he stooped to share with him his crust and wooden bowl of water.

Then it happened on the stage just as was told in the poem.

A light shone round about the place, and the crouching leper stood up. The old ragged mantle dropped off, and there in a long garment almost dazzling in its whiteness stood a figure —

> "Shining and tall, and fair, and straight
> As the pillar that stood by the Beautiful gate."

They could not see the face, it was turned aside; but the golden hair was like a glory, and the uplifted arms held something high in air that gleamed like a burnished star, as all the lights in the room were turned full upon it, for a little space. It was a golden cup. Then the voice again:

> "In many climes without avail
> Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail.
> Behold it is here — this cup, which thou
> Didst fill at the streamlet for me but now.
> The holy supper is kept indeed
> In whatso we share with another's need."

It was an old story to most of the audience, worn threadbare by many readings, but with living illustrations, and Miss Bond's wonderful way of telling it, a new meaning crept into the well-known lines, that thrilled every listener.

"Could you understand that, Teddy?" asked old Judge Fairfax, patting his little grandson on the head.

"Course!" exclaimed seven-year-old Ted, who had followed his sister Sally to every rehearsal.

"When you give money to people just to get rid of 'em, and because you feel you'd ought to, it doesn't count for anything. But if you divide something you've got, and would like to keep it all yourself, because you love to, and are sorry for 'em, then it counts a pile. Sir Launfal would have popped Jonesy into a 'sylum when he first started out to find that gold cup, but when he came back he'd 'a' worked like a horse

getting up a benefit for him, and would have divided his own home with him, if he hadn't been living at his grandmother's, and couldn't."

An amused smile went around that part of the audience which overheard Ted's shrilly given explanation.

Pictures from the "Idylls of the King" followed in rapid succession, and then came the prettiest of all, being the one in which Keith was made a knight. Virginia as queen, her short black hair covered by a powdered wig, and a long court-train sweeping behind her, stood touching his shoulder with the jewel-hilted sword, as he knelt at her feet. Lloyd and Sally Fairfax, Julia Ferris, and a dozen other pretty girls of the nieghbourhood, helped to fill out the gay court scene, while all the boys that could be persuaded to take part were dressed up for heralds, guardsmen, pages, and knights. That tableau had to be shown four times,

and then the audience kept on applauding as if they never intended to stop.

The last one in this series of tableaux was the Hall of the Shields, as Keith had described it to Jonesy. A whole row of dazzling shields hung across the back of the stage, emblazoned with the arms of all the old knights whose names have come down to us in song or story. Then for the first time that evening Miss Bond came out on the stage where she could be seen, and told the story of the death of King Arthur, and the passing away of the order of the Round Table. She told it so well that little Ted Fairfax listened with his mouth open, seeming to see the great arm that rose out of the water to take back the king's sword into the sea, from which it had been given him. An arm like a giant's, "clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful, that caught the sword by the hilt, flourished it three times, and drew it under the mere."

"True, 'the old order changeth,'" said Miss Bond, "but knighthood has not passed away. The flower of chivalry has blossomed anew in this new world, and America, too, has her Hall of the Shields."

Just a moment the curtains were drawn together, and then were widely parted again, as a chorus of voices rang out with the words:

"Hail, Columbia, happy land;
Hail, ye heroes, heaven-born band!"

In that moment, on every shield had been hung the pictured face of some well-known man who had helped to make his country a power among the nations; presidents, patriots, philanthropists, statesmen, inventors, and poets, — there they were, from army and navy, city and farm, college halls and humble cabins, — a long, long line, and the first was Washington, and the last was the "Hero of Manila."

Cheer after cheer went up, and it might

have been well to have ended the programme there, but to satisfy the military-loving little Ginger, one more was added.

"There ought to be a Goddess of Liberty in it" she insisted, "because it is Washington's birthday; and if we had been doing it by ourselves we were going to have something in it about Cuba, on papa's account."

So when the curtain rose the last time, it was on Sally Fairfax as a gorgeous Goddess of Liberty, conferring knighthood on two boys who stood for the Army and Navy, while a little dark-eyed girl knelt at their feet as Cuba, the distressed maiden whom their chivalry had rescued.

It was late when the performance closed; later still when the children reached home that night, for Mrs. MacIntyre had determined to have a flash-light picture taken of them, and they had to wait until the photographer could send home for his camera.

After they reached the house they could hardly be persuaded to undress. Virginia trailed up and down the halls in her royal robes, Malcolm clanked around in his suit of mail and plumed helmet, and Keith stood before a mirror, admiring the handsome little figure it showed him.

"I hate to take it off," he said, fingering the dazzling collar, ablaze with jewels. "I'd like to be a knight always, and wear a sword and spurs every day."

"So would I," said Malcolm, beginning to yawn sleepily. "I wish that Jonesy had been well enough to go to-night. Isn't it splendid that the Benefit turned out so well? Aunt Allison says there is plenty of money now to get Jonesy's clothes and pay his board till papa comes, and send him back to Barney, too, if papa thinks best and hasn't any better plan."

"I wish there'd been enough money to buy a nice little home out here in the country

for him and Barney. Wouldn't it have been lovely if there had a-been?" cried Keith.

"Well, I should say!" answered Malcolm. "Maybe we can have another benefit some day and make enough for that."

With this pleasant prospect before them, they laid aside their knightly garments, hoping to put them on again soon in Jonesy's behalf, and talked about the home that might be his some day, until they fell asleep.

The flash-light pictures of the three children were all that the fondest grandmother could wish. As soon as they came, Keith carried his away to his room to admire in private. "It is so pretty that it doesn't seem it can be me," he said, propping it up on the desk before him. "I wish that I could look that way always."

The next time that Miss Allison went into the room she found that Keith had written under it in his round, boyish hand, a quota-

tion that had taken his fancy the first time he heard it. It was in one of Miss Bond's stories, and he repeated it until he learned it: "Live pure, speak truth, right the wrong, follow the king; else wherefore born?"

She asked him about it at bedtime. "Why, that's our motto," he explained. "Malcolm has it written under his, too. We've made up our minds to be a sort of knight, just as near the real thing as we can, you know, and that is what knights have to do: live pure, and speak truth, and right the wrong. We've always tried to do the first two, so that won't be so hard. It's righting the wrong that will be the tough job, but we have done it a little teenty, weenty bit for Jonesy, don't you think, auntie? It was all wrong that he should have such a hard time and be sent to an asylum away from Barney, when we have you all and everything nice. Malcolm and I have been talking it over. If we could do something to keep him from

growing up into a tramp, like that awful man that brought him here, wouldn't that be as good a deed as some that the real knights did? Wouldn't that be serving our country, too, Aunt Allison, just a little speck?" He asked the question anxiously. Malcolm said nothing, but also waited with a wistful look for her answer.

"My dear little Sir Galahads," she said, bending over to give each of the boys a good-night kiss, "you will be 'really truly' knights if you can live up to the motto you have chosen. Heaven help you to be always as worthy of that title as you are to-night!"

Keith held her a moment, with both arms around her neck. "What does that mean, auntie?" he asked. "That is what the professor said, too, — Galahad."

"It is too late to explain to you to-night," she said, "but I will tell you sometime soon, dear."

It was several days before she reminded

them of that promise. Then she called them into her room and told them the story of Sir Galahad, the maiden knight, whose "strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure." Then from a little morocco case, lined with purple velvet, she took two pins that she had bought in the city that morning. Each was a little white enamel flower with a tiny diamond in the centre, like a drop of dew.

"You can't wear armour in these days," she said, as she fastened one on the lapel of each boy's coat, "but this shall be the badge of your knighthood, — 'wearing the white flower of a blameless life.' The little pins will help you to remember, maybe, and will remind you that you are pledged to right the wrong wherever you find it, in little things as well as great."

It was a very earnest talk that followed. The boys came out from her room afterward, wearing the tiny white pins, and with a

sweet seriousness in their faces. A noble purpose had been born in their hearts; but alas for chivalry! the first thing they did was to taunt Virginia with the fact that she could never be a knight because she was only a girl.

"I don't care," retorted Ginger, quickly. "I can be a — a — patriot, anyhow, and that's lots better."

The boys laughed, and she flushed angrily.

"They ought to mean the same thing exactly in this day of the world," said Miss Allison, coming up in time to hear the dispute that followed. "Virginia, you shall have a badge, too. Run into my room and bring me that little jewelled flag on my cushion."

"I think that this is the very prettiest piece of jewelry you have," exclaimed Virginia, coming back with the pin. It was a little flag whose red, white, and blue was made of tiny settings of garnets, sapphires, and diamonds.

"You think that, because it is in the shape of a flag," said Miss Allison, with an amused smile. "Well, it shall be yours. See how well it can remind you of the boys' knightly motto. There is the white for the first part, the 'live pure,' and the 'true blue' for the 'speak truth,' and then the red, — surely no soldier's little daughter needs to be told what that stands for, when her own brave father has spilled part of his good red life-blood to 'right the wrong' on the field of battle."

"Oh, Aunt Allison!" was all that Virginia could gasp in her delight as she clasped the precious pin tightly in her hand. "Is it mine? For my very own?"

"For your very own, dear," was the answer.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Virginia, thanking her with a kiss. "I'd a thousand times rather have it than one like the boys'. It means so much more!"

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE COLONEL'S TWO RESCUES

EARLY in March, when the crocuses were beginning to bud under the dining-room windows, there came one of those rare spring days that seem to carry the warmth of summer in its sunshine.

"Exactly the kind of a day for a picnic," Virginia had said that morning, and when her grandmother objected, saying that the ground was still too damp, she suggested having it in the hay-barn. The boys piled the hay that was left from the winter's supply up on one side of the great airy room, set

wide the big double doors, and swept it clean.

"It is clean enough now for even grandmother to eat in," said Virginia, as she spread a cloth on the table Unc' Henry had carried out for them. "It's good enough for a queen. Oh, I'll tell you what let's do. Let's play that Malcolm and I are a wicked king and queen and Lloyd is a 'fair ladye' that we have shut up in a dungeon. This will be a banquet, and while we are eating Keith can be the knight who comes to her rescue and carries her off on his pony."

"That's all right," consented Keith, "except the eating part. How can we get our share of the picnic?"

"We'll save it for you," answered Virginia, "and you can eat it afterward."

"Save enough for Jonesy, too," said Keith. "He shall be my page and help me rescue her. I'll go and ask him now."

The month had made a great change in

Jonesy. With plenty to eat, his thin little snub-nosed face grew plump and bright. There was a good-humoured twinkle in his sharp eyes, and being quick as a monkey at imitating the movements of those around him, Mrs. MacIntyre found nothing to criticise in his manners when Malcolm and Keith brought him into the house. Their pride in him was something amusing, and seeing that, after all, he was an inoffensive little fellow, she made no more objections to their playing with him.

By the time Keith was back again with Jonesy, the other guests had arrived, and the Little Colonel had been lowered into a deep feed-bin, in lieu of a dungeon. The banquet began in great state, but in a few moments was interrupted by a fearful shrieking from the depths of the bin. The fair ladye protested that she would not stay in her dungeon.

"There's nasty big spidahs down heah!"

she called. "Ow! One is crawlin' on my neck now, and my face is all tangled up in cobwebs! Get me out! Get me out! Quick, Gingah!"

The king sprang up to go to her rescue, but was promptly motioned to his seat again by a warning shake of the other crowned head.

"Why, of course! There's always spiders in dungeons," called the wicked queen, coolly helping herself to another piece of chicken. "Besides, you should say 'your Majesty' when you are talking to me."

"But there's a mouse in heah, too," she called back, in distress. "Oo! Oo! It ran ovah my feet. If you don't make them take me out of heah, Gingah Dudley, I'll do something awful to you! Murdah! Murdah!" she yelled, pounding on the sides of the bin with both her fists and stamping her little foot in a furious rage.

Seeing that Lloyd was really terrified, and fearing that her screams would bring some

one from the house, the royal couple and their guests sprang to the rescue, nearly upsetting the banquet as they did so. The game would have been broken up then, when she was lifted out from the feed-bin, red and angry, if it had not been for the king's great tact. He brushed the cobwebs from her face and hair, and even got down on his royal knees to ask her pardon.

His polite coaxing finally had its effect on the little lady, and he persuaded her to climb a ladder into a loft just above them. Here on a pile of clean hay, beside an open window that looked across a peaceful meadow, her anger cooled. Towers were far more comfortable than dungeons, in her opinion, and when Malcolm came up the ladder with a plateful of the choicest morsels of the feast, she began to enjoy her part of the play. Jonesy was sent to inform his knight of the change from dungeon to tower, and the banquet went merrily on.

He found Keith waiting below the barn, with his pony tied to a fence. On the other side of the fence lay the railroad track, which skirted the back of Mrs. MacIntyre's place for over half a mile.

"Do you see that hand-car?" asked Keith, pointing with his riding-whip to one on the track. "The section boss let Malcolm and me ride up and down on it all afternoon one day this winter. Some workman left it on the switch while ago, and while you were up at the barn I got two darkeys to move it for me. They didn't want to at first, but I knew that there'd be no train along for an hour, and told 'em so, and they finally did it for a dime apiece. As soon as I rescue Lloyd I'll dash down here on my pony with her behind me. Then we'll slip through the fence and get on the hand-car, and be out of sight around the curve before the rest get here. They won't know where on earth we've gone, and it will be the best joke on

them. It's down grade all the way to the section-house, so I can push it easily enough by myself, but I'll need your help coming back, maybe. S'pose you cut across lots to the section-house as soon as I start to the barn, and meet me there. It isn't half as far that way, so you'll get there as soon as we do."

"All right," said Jonesy. "I'm your kid."

"You should say, 'Tis well, Sir Knight, I fly to do thy bidding,'" prompted Keith.

Jonesy grinned. He could not enter into the spirit of the play as the others did. "Aw, I'll be on time," he said; then, as Keith untied his pony, started on a run across the fields.

The Lady Lloyd had not finished her repast when her rescuer appeared, but she put the plate down on the hay to await her return, and obediently climbed down the ladder he placed for her. They reached the fence before the banqueters knew that she had escaped. Flinging the pony's bridle over a

fence-post, when they reached the edge of the field, the brave knight crawled through the fence and pulled Lloyd after him, tearing her dress, much to that dainty little lady's extreme disgust.

By the time the king and his guard were mounted in pursuit, on the other pony which stood in waiting, the runaways were in the hand-car. It moved slowly at first, although Keith was strong for his age, and his hardy little muscles were untiring.

"Isn't it lovely?" cried Lloyd, as they moved faster and faster and swept around the curve. "I wish we could go all the way to Louisville on this." The warm March wind fanned her pink cheeks, and blew her soft light hair into her eyes.

Jonesy was waiting at the section-house, and waved his cap as they passed. "We're going on, around the next bend," shouted Keith, as they passed him. "Whoop-la! this is fine, and not a bit hard to work!"

"What will the wicked queen think when she can't find us?" asked Lloyd, laughing happily, as they sped on down the track.

"She'll think that I am a magician and have spirited you away," said Keith.

"Then if you are a magician you ought to change her into a nasty black spidah, to pay her back fo' shuttin' me up with them!" Lloyd was delighted with this new play. For the time it seemed as if she really were escaping from a castle prison. Faster and faster they went. Jonesy, who had followed them to the second curve, stood watching them with wistful eyes, wishing he could be with them. They passed the depot, and then the hand-car seemed to grow smaller and smaller as it rolled away, until it was only a moving speck in the distance. Then he turned and walked back to the section-house.

"I s'pect we've gone about far enough," said Keith, after awhile. "We'd better turn

around now and go back, or the picnic will all be over before we get our share. Let's wait here a minute till I rest my arms, and then we'll start."

The place where they had stopped was the loneliest part of the track that could be found in miles, on either side. It was in the midst of a thick beech woods, and the twitter of a bird, now and then, was the only sound in all the deep stillness.

"What lovely green moss on that bank!" cried the Little Colonel. "Wouldn't it make a beautiful carpet for our playhouse down by the old mill?"

"I'll get you some," said Keith, gallantly springing from the car and clambering up the bank. Taking out his knife, he began to cut great squares of the velvety green moss, and pile it up to carry back to the hand-car.

Meanwhile Jonesy waited at the section-house, digging his heels into the cinders that

lined the track, and looking impatiently down the road. Presently the section boss came limping along painfully, and sat down on the bank in the warm spring sunshine. He had dropped a piece of heavy machinery on his foot, the week before, and was only able to hobble short distances.

Everybody in the Valley was interested in Jonesy since the fire and the Benefit had made him so well known, and the man was glad of this opportunity to satisfy his curiosity about the boy. Jonesy, with all the fearlessness of a little street gamin brought up in a big city, answered him fearlessly, even saucily at times, much to the man's amusement.

"So you want to get a job around here, do you?" said the man, presently, with a grin. "Maybe I can give you one. Know anything about railroadin'?"

"Heaps," answered Jonesy. "Well, I'd ought to, seein' as I've lived next door to the

engine yards all my life, and spent my time dodgin' the cop on watch there, when I was tryin' to steal rides on freight-cars and such."

"Is that what you're hangin' around here now for?" asked the man, with a good-natured twinkle in his eyes.

"Nope! I'm waiting for that MacIntyre kid to come back this way. He went down the track a bit ago on a hand-car, playing rescue a princess with one of the girls at the picnic."

The section boss sprang up with an exclamation of alarm. "How far's he gone?" he asked. "There's a special due to pass here in a few minutes."

Even while he spoke there sounded far away in the distance, so far that it was like only a faint echo, the whistle of an approaching locomotive. The man hobbled down the track a yard or so and stopped. "What do you suppose they'll do?" he asked. "There

are so many bends in this road, the train may come right on to 'em before the engineer sees 'em. S'pose they'll jump off, or turn and try to come back?"

Jonesy glanced around wildly a second, and then sprang forward toward the man.

"Give me the switch-key!" he cried, in a high voice, shrill with excitement. "You can't run, but I can. Give me the switch-key!" Perplexed by the sudden turn of affairs and the little fellow's commanding tone, the man took the key from his pocket. He realised his own helplessness to do anything, and there was something in Jonesy's manner that inspired confidence. He felt that the child's quick wit had grasped the situation and formed some sensible plan of action.

Again the whistle sounded in the distance, and, snatching the key, Jonesy was off down the track like an arrow. The section boss, leaning heavily on his cane, limped after him as fast as he could.

Keith and the Little Colonel, having gathered the moss and started back home, were rolling leisurely along, still talking of magicians and their ilk.

"What if we should meet a dragon?" cried the Little Colonel. "A dragon with a scaly green tail, and red eyes and a fiery tongue. What would you do then?"

"I'd say, 'What! Ho! Thou monster!' and cleave him in twain with my good broadsword, and when he saw its shining blade smite through the air he'd just curl up and die."

Keith looked back to smile at the bright laughing face beside him. Then he caught sight of something over his shoulder that made him pause. "Oh, look!" he cried, pointing over the tree-tops behind them. A little puff of smoke, rising up in the distance, trailed along the sky like a long banner. At the same instant, out of the smoke, sounded the whistle of an approaching engine. The

track behind them had so many turns, he could not judge of their distance from it, and for an instant he stopped working the handle bar up and down, too thoroughly frightened to know what to do. An older child might have acted differently; might have jumped from the hand-car and left it to be run into by the approaching train, or have hurried back around the bend to flag the engine. But Keith had only one idea left: that was to keep ahead of the train as long as possible. It seemed so far away he thought they could surely reach the depot before it caught up with them, and his sturdy little arms bent to the task.

For a moment there was a real pleasure in the exertion. He felt with an excited thrill that he was really running away with the Little Colonel, and rescuing her from a pursuing danger. Suddenly the whistle sounded again, and this time it seemed so close behind them that the Little Colonel gave a

terrified glance over her shoulder and then screamed at the sight of the great snorting monster, breathing out fire and smoke, worse than any scaly-tailed dragon that she had ever imagined. It was far down the track, but they could hear its terrible rumble as it rushed over a trestle, and the singing of the wires overhead.

Keith was straining every muscle now, but it was like running in a nightmare. His arms moved up and down at a furious speed, but it seemed to him that the hand-car was glued to one spot. It seemed, too, that it had been hours since they first discovered that the engine was after them, and he felt that he would soon be too exhausted to move another stroke. Would the depot never never come in sight?

Just then they shot around the curve and caught sight of Jonesy at the depot switch, wildly beckoning with his cap and shouting for them to come on. At that sight, with

one supreme effort Keith put his fast-failing strength to the test, and sent the hand-car rolling forward faster than ever. It shot past the switch that Jonesy had unlocked and off to the side-track, just as the train bore down upon them around the last bend.

There was barely time for Jonesy to set the switch again before it thundered on along the main track past the little depot. Being a special, it did not stop. As it went shrieking by, the engineer cast a curious glance at a hand-car on the side-track. A little girl sat on it, a pretty golden-haired child with dark eyes big with fright, and her face as white as her dress. He wondered what was the matter.

For a moment after the shrieking train whizzed by everything seemed deathly still. Keith sat leaning against the embankment, white and limp from exhaustion and the excitement of his close escape. Jonesy was panting and wiping the perspiration from

his red face, for he had run like a deer to reach the switch in time.

"I couldn't have held out a minute longer," said Keith, presently. "My arms felt like they had gone to sleep, and I was just ready to give up when I caught sight of you. That seemed to give me strength to go on, when I saw what you were at and that it would only be a little farther to go before we would be safe. How did you happen to be at the switch, and know how to set it?"

"Hain't lived all my life around engine yards fer nothin'," answered Jonesy. "Why didn't you jump off and flag the train?"

"I was so taken by surprise I didn't think of that," answered Keith. "The only thing I knew was that we had to keep ahead of it as long as possible. You've saved my life, Jones Carter, and I'll never forget it, no matter what comes."

"I've been rescued twice to-day," said the Little Colonel, taking a deep breath as she

began to recover from her fright. "Jonesy ought to be a knight, too."

"That's so!" exclaimed Keith, springing to his feet. "Come on and let's go back to the barn. We'll tell our adventures, and then we'll go through the ceremony of making Jonesy a Sir Something or other. He's certainly won his spurs."

"Goin' back on the hand-car?" asked Jonesy.

"Not much," answered Keith, with a sickly sort of smile. "Somehow such fast travelling doesn't seem to agree with a fellow. Walking is good enough for me."

"Me too!" cried the Little Colonel, tying on her white sunbonnet. "But the first part of it was lovely, — just like flyin'."

Jonesy ran back to give the man his key, and was kept answering questions so long that he did not catch up with the other children until they were in sight of the barn.

"After all," said Keith, as the three

trudged along together, "maybe we'd better not tell how near we came to being run over. Grandmother and Aunt Allison would be dreadfully worried if they should hear of it. They are always worrying for fear something will happen to us."

"Mothah would be wild," exclaimed the Little Colonel, "if she knew I had been in any dangah. Maybe she wouldn't let me out of her sight again to play all summah."

"Then let's don't tell for a long, long time," proposed Keith. "It'll be our secret, just for us three."

"All right," the others agreed. They dropped the subject then, for the barn was just ahead of them, and the gay picnickers came running out, demanding to know where they had been so long.

The Little Colonel often spoke of her experience afterward to the two boys, however, and in Keith's day-dreams a home for Jonesy began to crowd out all other hopes and plans.

CHAPTER VII

A GAME OF INDIAN

EITH was stiff for a week after his race on the hand-car, but did his groaning in private. He knew what a commotion would be raised if the matter came to his grandmother's ears. She had lived all winter in constant dread of accidents. Malcolm had been carried home twice in an unconscious state, once from having been thrown from his bicycle, and once from falling through a trap-door in the barn. Keith had broken through the ice on the pond, sprained his wrist while coasting, and walked in half a dozen

times with the blood streaming from some wound on his head or face.

Virginia had never been hurt, but her hair-breadth escapes would have filled a volume. An amusing one was the time she lassoed a young calf, Indian fashion, to show the boys how it should be done. Its angry mother was in the next lot, but Virginia felt perfectly safe as she swung her lariat and dragged the bleating calf around the barnyard. She did not stop to consider that if a cow with lofty ambitions had once jumped over the moon, one which saw its calf in danger might easily leap a low hedge. Malcolm's warning shout came just in time to save her from being gored by the angry animal, who charged at her with lowered horns. She sprang up the ladder leading to the corn-crib window, where she was safe, but she had to hang there until Unc' Henry could be called to the rescue.

It was with many misgivings that Mrs.

MacIntyre and Miss Allison started to the city one morning in April. It was the first time since the children's coming that they had both gone away at once, and nothing but urgent business would have made them consent to go.

The children promised at least a dozen things. They would keep away from the barn, the live stock, the railroad, the ponds, and the cisterns. They would not ride their wheels, climb trees, nor go off the MacIntyre premises, and they would keep a sharp look-out for snakes and poison ivy, in case they went into the woods for wild flowers.

"Seems to me there's mighty little left that a fellow can do," said Keith, when the long list was completed.

"Oh, the time will soon pass," said his grandmother, who was preparing to take the eleven o'clock train. "It will soon be lunch-time. Then this is the day for you each to write your weekly letters to your

mother, and it is so pretty in the woods now that I am sure you will enjoy looking for violets."

Time did pass quickly, as their grandmother had said it would, until the middle of the afternoon. Then Virginia began to wish for something more amusing than the quiet guessing games they had been playing in the library. The boys each picked up a book, and she strolled off up-stairs, in search of a livelier occupation.

In a few minutes she came down, looking like a second Pocahontas in her Indian suit, with her bow and arrows slung over her shoulder.

"I am going down to the woods to practise shooting," she announced, as she stopped to look in at the door.

"Oh, wait just a minute!" begged Malcolm, throwing down his book. "Let's all play Indian this afternoon. We'll rig up, too, and build a wigwam down by the spring

rock, and make a fire, — grandmother didn't say we couldn't make a fire; that's about the only thing she forgot to tell us not to do."

"You can come on when you get ready," answered Virginia. "I'm going now, because it is getting late, but you'll find me near the spring when you come. Just yell."

The boys could not hope to rival Virginia's Indian costume, but no wilder-looking little savages ever uttered a war-whoop than the two which presently dashed into the still April woods.

Malcolm had ripped some variegated fringe from a table-cover to pin down the sides of his leather leggins. He had borrowed a Roman blanket from Aunt Allison's couch to pin around his shoulders, and emptied several tubes of her most expensive paints to streak his face with hideous stripes and daubs. A row of feathers from the dust-brush was fastened around his forehead by

a broad band, and a hatchet from the woodshed provided him with a tomahawk.

Keith had no time to arrange feathers. He had taken off his flannels in order to put on an old striped bathing-suit, which he had found in the attic and stored away, intending to use it for swimming in the pond when the weather should grow warm enough. It had no sleeves, and the short trousers had shrunk until they did not half-way reach his knees. Its red and white stripes had faded and the colour run until the whole was a dingy "crushed strawberry" shade. As Malcolm had emptied all the tubes of red paint in his Aunt Allison's box, Keith had to content himself with some other colour. He chose the different shades of green, squeezing the paint out on his plump little legs and arms, and rubbing it around with his fore finger until he was encircled with as many stripes as a zebra. Although the day was warm for the early part of April, the sudden change

from his customary clothes and spring flannels to nothing but the airy bathing suit and war-paint made him a trifle chilly; so he completed his costume by putting on a pair of scarlet bedroom slippers, edged with dark fur.

With the dropping of their civilised clothing, the boys seemed to have dropped all recollections of their professed knighthood, and acted like the little savages they looked.

"We're going to shoot with your things awhile, Ginger," shouted Keith, coming suddenly upon her with a whoop, and snatching her bow out of her hands. "You are the squaw, so you have to do all the work. Get down there now behind that rock and make a fire, while we go out and kill a deer. You must build a wigwam, too, by the time we get back. Hear me? I'm a big chief! 'I am Famine — Buckadawin!' and I'll make a living skeleton of you if you don't hustle."

Virginia was furious. "I'll not be a squaw!" she cried. "And I'll not build a fire or do anything else if you talk so rudely. If you don't give me back my bow and let me be a chief, too, I'll — I'll get even with you, sir, in a way you won't like. I have short hair, and my clothes are more Indian than yours, and I can shoot better than either of you, anyhow! So there! Give me my bow."

"What will you do if I won't?" said Keith, teasingly, holding it behind him.

"I'll go up to the barn and get a rope, and lasso you like I did that calf, and drag you all over the place!" cried Virginia, her eyes shining with fierce determination.

"She means it, Keith," said Malcolm. "She'll do it sure, if you don't stop teasing. Oh, give it to her and come along, or it will be dark before we begin to play."

Matters went on more smoothly after Malcolm's efforts at peacemaking, and when

it was decided that Ginger could be a brave, too, instead of a squaw, they were soon playing together as pleasantly as if they had found the happy hunting grounds. The short afternoon waned fast, and the shadows were growing deep when they reached the last part of the game. Ginger had been taken prisoner, and they were tying her to a tree, with her hands bound securely behind her back. She rather enjoyed this part of it, for she intended to show them how brave she could be.

"Now, we'll sit around the council fire and decide how to torture her," said Malcolm, when the captive was securely tied. But the fire was out and they had no matches. The lot fell on Malcolm to run up to the house and get some.

"A fire would feel good," said Keith, looking around with a shiver as he seated himself on a log near Ginger. The sun was low in the west, and very little of its light

and warmth found its way into the woods where the children were playing.

"It makes me think of Hiawatha," said Ginger, looking down at several long streaks of golden light which lay across the ground at her feet. "Don't you remember how it goes? 'And the long and level sunbeams shot their spears into the forest, breaking through its shield of shadow.' Isn't that pretty? I love Hiawatha. I am going to learn pages and pages of it some day. I know all that part about Minnehaha now."

"Say it while we are waiting," said Keith, pulling his short trousers down as far as possible, and wishing that he had sleeves, or else that the paint were thicker on his chilly arms.

"All right," began Virginia.

"'Oh the long and dreary winter!
Oh the cold and cruel winter!
Ever thicker, thicker, thicker
Froze the ice on lake and river.'"

"Ugh! Don't!" interrupted Keith, with a shiver. "It makes my teeth chatter, talking about such cold things!"

Just then a shout came ringing down the hill, "Oh, Keith! Come here a minute! Quick!"

"What do you wa-ant?" yelled Keith, in return.

"Come up here! Quick! Hurry up!"

"What do you s'pose can be the matter?" exclaimed Keith, scrambling to his feet. "Maybe the bear has got loose and run away."

"Come and untie me first," said Virginia, "and I'll go, too." Keith gave several quick tugs at the many knotted string which bound her, but could not loosen it. Again the call came, impatient and sharp, "Keith! Oh, Keith!"

"Oh, I can't loosen it a bit," said Keith. "You'll have to wait till Malcolm comes with his knife. We'll be back in just a minute. I'll go and see what's the matter."

"Be sure that you don't stop!" screamed Ginger, as the scarlet bedroom slippers and green striped legs flashed out of sight through the bushes.

"Back — in — a — minute!" sounded shrilly through the woods.

Keith found Malcolm on the back porch, pounding excitedly on a box which the expressman had left there a few minutes before.

"It's the camera we have been looking for all week," he cried. "Come on and have a look at it."

"Ginger said to hurry back," said Keith.

"Pshaw! It won't take but a minute. I'll pry the box open in a jiffy."

It was harder work than the boys had supposed, to take the tightly nailed lid from its place, and they were so intent on their work they did not realise how quickly the minutes were passing.

"Isn't it a beauty?" exclaimed Malcolm,

when it was at last unpacked. "It's lots bigger and finer than the one papa promised. But that's the way he always does. Oh, isn't it a peach!"

"I'll tell you what," said Keith, dancing up and down in his excitement, until he looked like a ridiculous little clown in the faded pink bathing-suit and his stripes of green paint, "let's take each other's pictures while we are dressed this way. We may never look so funny again, and we can go down and take Ginger, too, while she is tied to the tree."

"Can't now," said Malcolm, "it's too dark down there in the woods by this time. See! there is nothing left now of the sun but those red clouds above the place where it went down. I'm afraid it is too dark even for us up here on the hill; but we can try. You do look funny, just like a jumping-jack or a monkey on a stick."

"Surely Ginger won't mind waiting long

enough for us to do it," said Keith. "Anyhow we can never dress up this way again, and grandmother will be coming home very soon, so you take mine quick, and I will take yours."

The boys had had some practice before with a cheap little camera, but this required some studying of the printed directions before they could use it. The first time they tried it the plates were put in wrong, and the second time they forgot to remove the cap. There were other things in the box besides the camera: some beautiful pink curlew's wings, a handsomely marked snake skin, and some rare shells that had been picked up on the Gulf coast. Of course the boys had to examine each new treasure as it was discovered. One thing after another delayed them until it was dusk even on the porch where they stood, and in the woods below a deep twilight had fallen.

Every minute that had sped by so rapidly

for the boys, seemed an age to the captive Virginia. Her arms ached from the strain of their unusual position. Swarms of gnats flew about, stinging her face, and mosquitoes buzzed teasingly around her ears. She was unable to move a finger to drive them away.

When the boys had been gone fifteen minutes she thought they must have been away hours. At the end of half an hour she was wild with impatience to get loose, but, thinking they might return any minute, she made no sign of her discomfort. She would be as heroic as the bravest brave ever tortured by cruel savages. As long as it was light she kept up her courage, but presently it began to grow dark under the great beech-trees. A frog down by the spring set up a dismal croaking. What if they should not come back, and her grandmother and Aunt Allison should miss the train, and have to stay in the city all night! Then nobody would come to set her free, and she would have to

stay in the lonely woods all by herself, tied to a tree, with her hands behind her back.

At that thought she began calling, "Keith! Keith! Malcolm! Oh, Malcolm!" but only an echo came back to her, as it had to the dying Minnehaha, — a far-away echo that mocked her with its teasing cry of "Malcolm!" Call after call went ringing through the woods, but nobody answered. Nobody came.

There was a rustling through the leaves behind her, as of a snake gliding around the tree. She was not afraid of snakes in the daytime, and when she was unbound, but she shrieked and turned cold at the thought of one wriggling across her feet while she was powerless to get away. Every time a twig snapped, or there was a fluttering in the bushes, she strained her eyes to see what horrible thing might be creeping up toward her. She had no thought that live Indians might be lurking about, but all the terrible

stories she had ever heard, of the days of Daniel Boone and the early settlers, came back to haunt the woods with a nameless dread.

She felt that she was standing on the real Kentucky that the Indians meant, when they gave the State its name. "Dark and bloody ground! Dark and bloody ground!" something seemed to say just behind her. Then the trees took it up, and all the leaves whispered, "Sh — sh, sh! Dark and bloody ground! Sh — sh!"

At that she was so frightened that she began calling again, but the sound of her own voice startled her. "Oh, they are not coming," she thought, with a miserable ache in her throat, that seemed swelling bigger and bigger. "I'll have to stay here in the woods all night. Oh, mamma! mamma!" she moaned, "I am so scared! If you could only come back and get your poor little girl!"

Up to this time she had bravely fought back the tears, but just then a screech-owl flapped down from a branch above her with such a dismal hooting that she gave a nervous start and a cry of terror. "Oh, that frightened me so!" she sobbed. "I don't believe I can stand it to be out here all night alone with so many horrible creepy things everywhere. And nobody cares! Nobody but papa and mamma, and they are away, way off in Cuba. Maybe I'll never see them any more." At that the tears rolled down her face, and she could not move a hand to wipe them away. To be so little and miserable and forsaken, so worn out with waiting and so helpless among all these unknown horrors that the dark woods might hold, was worse torture to the imaginative child then any bodily pain could have been.

It was just as her last bit of courage oozed away, and she began to cry, that the boys

suddenly realised how long they had left her.

"It must be as dark as a pocket in the woods by this time," exclaimed Malcolm. "What do you suppose Ginger will say to us for leaving her so long?"

"You will have to take a knife to cut her loose," said Keith. "I tried to untie the knots before I came away, but I couldn't move them."

"My pocket-knife is up-stairs," answered Malcolm. "I'll get something in the dining-room that will do."

He was rushing out again with a carving-knife in his hand, when he came face to face with his grandmother and Aunt Allison. The boys had been so interested in their camera that they had not heard the train whistle, or the sound of footsteps coming up on the front veranda. Pete was lighting the hall lamps as the ladies came in, and he turned his back to hide the broad grin on

his face, as he thought of the sight which would soon greet them. Mrs. MacIntyre gave a gasp of astonishment and sank down in the nearest chair as Malcolm came dashing into the bright lamplight.

His turkey feathers were all awry, standing out in a dozen different directions from his head, his blanket trailed behind him, and the fringe was hanging in festoons from his leggins, where it had come unpinned. The red paint on his face made him look as if he had been in a fight with the carving-knife he carried, and had had the skin peeled off his face in patches.

Wild as he looked, his appearance was tame beside that of the impish-looking little savage who skipped in after him, in the scarlet bedroom slippers, pink striped bathing-suit and green striped skin.

"Keith MacIntyre, what have you been doing to yourself?" gasped his grandmother. Both boys began an excited exclamation, but

were stopped by Miss Allison's question, "Where is Virginia? Have you two little savages scalped her?"

"She's tied to a tree down by the spring," answered Malcolm. "We are just starting down there now to cut her loose. You see we were playing Indian, and she was tied up to be tortured, and we forgot all about her being there —"

But Miss Allison waited to hear no more. "The poor little thing!" she exclaimed. "Tied out there alone in the dark woods! How could you be so cruel? It is enough to frighten her into spasms."

"I'm awfully sorry, Aunt Allison!" began Malcolm, but his aunt was already out of hearing. Out of the door she ran, through the dewy grass and the stubble of the field beyond, regardless of her dainty spring gown, or her new patent leather shoes.

Malcolm and Keith dashed out after her, ran on ahead and were at the spring before

she had climbed the fence into the woodland.

Virginia was not crying when the boys reached her. She remembered that she had once called Malcolm "Rain-in-the-face" because she caught him crying over something that seemed to her a very little reason, and she did not intend to give him a chance to taunt her in the same way. She was glad that it was too dark for him to notice her tear-swollen eyes.

"Whew! It's dark down here!" said Keith. "Were you frightened, Ginger?" he asked, as he helped Malcolm unfasten the cords that bound her. But Ginger made no reply to either questions or apologies. She walked on in dignified silence, too deeply hurt by their neglect, too full of a sense of the wrong they had done her, to trust herself to speak without crying, and she intended to be game to the last. But when she came upon Miss Allison, and suddenly found her-

self folded safe in her arms, with pitying kisses and comforting caresses, she clung to her, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Oh, auntie! It was so awful!" was all she could say, but she repeated it again and again, until Miss Allison, who had never seen her so excited before, was alarmed. The boys, who had run on ahead to the house again, before she gave way to her feelings, were inclined to look upon it all as a good joke, for they had no idea how much she had suffered, and did not like it because she would not speak to them. They changed their minds when Miss Allison came out of Virginia's room a little later, and told them that the fright had given the child a nervous chill, and that she had cried herself to sleep.

"We didn't mean to do it," said Keith, penitently. "We just forgot, and I'm mighty sorry, truly, I am auntie!"

"I am not scolding you," said Miss Allison, "but if I were either of you boys, I wouldn't

wear my little white flower when I dressed for dinner to-night. Instead of being the protector of a distressed maiden, as the old knights would have said, you have done her a wrong, — a serious one I am afraid, — and that wrong ought to be made right as far as possible before you are worthy to wear the badge of knighthood again."

"We'll go and beg her pardon right now," said Malcolm.

"No, she is asleep now, and I do not want her to be disturbed. Besides, a mere apology is not enough. You must make some kind of atonement. The first thing for you to do, however, is to get some turpentine and remove that paint. Where did you get it, boys?"

"Out of your paint-box," Aunt Allison, said Malcolm. "We didn't think you would care. I was only going to take a little, but it soaked in so fast that I had to use two tubes of it."

"I used more than that," confessed Keith, looking at her with his big honest eyes; "but I got so interested pretending that I was turning into a real Indian, that I never thought about its being anybody else's paint, Aunt Allison, truly I didn't!"

She turned away to hide a smile. The earnest little face above the striped body was so very comical. Picking up several of the empty tubes that had been squeezed quite flat, she read the labels. "Rose madder and carmine," she said, solemnly, "two of my very most expensive paints."

"Dear me!" sighed Malcolm, "then there's another wrong that's got to be righted. I guess Keith and I weren't cut out for knights. I'm beginning to think that it's a mighty tough business anyhow."

That night, when the boys came down to dinner, no little white flower with its diamond dewdrop centre shone on the lapel of either coat. It had been a work of time to

scrub off the paint, and then it took almost as long to get rid of the turpentine, so that dinner was ready long before Keith was finally clad in his flannels. "My throat is sore," he complained to Malcolm at bedtime, but did not mention it to any one else that night. He sat on the side of his bed a moment before undressing, with one foot across his knee, staring thoughtfully at the lamp. Presently, with one shoe in his hand and the other half unlaced, he hopped over to the dressing-table and stood before it, looking at first one picture and then another.

Eight different photographs of his mother were ranged along the table below the wide mirror, some taken in evening dress, some in simple street costume, and each one so beautiful that it would have been hard to decide which one had the greatest charm.

"I wish mamma was here to-night," said Keith, softly, with a little quiver of his lip. "Seems like she's been gone almost always."

He picked up a large Roman locket of beaten silver that lay open on the table. It held two exquisitely painted miniatures on ivory. One was the same sweet face that looked out at him from each of the photographs, the other was his father's. It showed a handsome young fellow with strong, clean-shaven face, with eyes like Keith's, and the same lordly poise of the fine head that Malcolm had.

"Good night, papa, good night, mamma!" whispered Keith, touching his lips hastily to each picture while Malcolm's back was turned. There were tears in his eyes. Somehow he was so miserably homesick.

Next morning, although Keith's throat was not so sore, he was burning with fever by the time his lessons were over. Before his grandmother saw him he was off on his wheel for a long ride, and then, because he was so hot when he came back, he slipped away to the pond with the pink bathing-suit

under his coat, and took the swim that he had been looking forward to so long. Nobody knew where he was, and he stayed in the water until his lips and finger-nails were blue. The morning after that he was too ill to get up, and Mrs. MacIntyre sent for a doctor.

"He has always been so perfectly well, and seemed to have such a strong constitution, that I cannot allow myself to believe this will be anything serious," said Mrs. MacIntyre, but at the end of the third day he was so much worse that she sent to the city for a trained nurse, and telegraphed for his father and mother.

They had already left Florida, and were yachting up the Atlantic coast on their way home when the message reached them.

CHAPTER VIII

"FAIRCHANCE"

ALCOLM did his best to atone to Virginia for what she had suffered from the forgetfulness of the two little Indians, but poor Keith was too ill to remember anything about it. He did not know his father and mother when they came, and tossed restlessly about, talking wildly of things they could not understand. It was the first time he had ever been so ill, and as they watched him lying there day after day, burning with fever, and growing white and thin, a great fear came upon them that he would never be any better.

No one put that fear into words, but little by little it crept from heart to heart like a wintry fog, until the whole house felt its chill. The sweet spring sounds and odours came rushing in at every window from the sunny world outside, but it might as well have been midwinter. No one paid any heed while that little life hung in the balance. The servants went through the house on tiptoe. Malcolm and Virginia haunted the halls to discover from the grave faces of the older people what they were afraid to ask, and Mrs. MacIntyre was kept busy answering the inquiries of the neighbours. Scarcely an hour passed that some one did not come to ask about Keith, to leave flowers, or to proffer kindly services. Everybody who knew the little fellow loved him. His bright smile and winning manner had made him a host of friends.

There was no lack of attention. His father and mother, Miss Allison, and the

nurse watched every breath, every pulse-beat; and a dozen times in the night his grandmother stole to the door to look anxiously at the wan little face on the pillow.

"It is so strange," said his mother to the nurse one day. "He keeps talking about a white flower. He says that he can't right the wrong unless he wears it, and that Jonesy will have to be shut up and never find his brother again. What do you suppose he means?"

The nurse shook her head. She did not know. Just then Mrs. MacIntyre heard her name called softly, "Elise," and her husband beckoned her to come out into the hall. "I want to show you something in Allison's room," he said, leading her down the hall to his sister's apartment. On each side of the low writing-desk stood a large photograph, one of Malcolm in his suit of mail, the other of Keith in the costume of jewel-embroidered velvet, like the little Duke of Gloster's.

"Oh, Sydney! How beautiful!" she ex-

claimed, as she swept across the room and knelt down before the desk for a better view. Leaning her arms on the desk, she looked into Keith's pictured face with hungry eyes. "Isn't he lovely?" she repeated. "Oh, he'll never look like that again! I know it! I know it!" she sobbed, remembering how white was the little face on the pillow that she had just left.

Mr. MacIntyre bent over her, his own handsome face white and haggard. He looked ill himself, from the constant watching and anxiety. "I'd give anything in the world that I own! Everything!" he groaned. "I'd do anything, sacrifice anything, to see him as well and sturdy as he looks there!"

Then he caught up the picture. "What's this written underneath?" he asked. "It is in Keith's own handwriting: 'Live pure, speak truth, right the wrong, follow the king. Else wherefore born?'"

"What does it mean, Allison?" he asked, turning to his sister, who was resting on a couch by the window. "It is written under Malcolm's picture, too."

"The dear little Sir Galahads," she said; "I sent for you to tell you about them. The boys intended the pictures as a surprise for you and Elise, so we never sent them. They wanted to tell you themselves about the Benefit and the little waif they gave it for."

She took a little pin from a jewel-case under the sofa pillows, and reaching over, dropped it in her brother's hand. It was a tiny flower of white enamel, with a diamond dewdrop in the centre.

"You may have noticed Malcolm wearing one like it," she said, and then she told them the story of Jonesy and the bear and all that their coming had led to: the Benefit, the new order of knighthood, and the awakening of the boys to a noble purpose.

"The boys fully expect you to stand by

them in all this, Sydney," she said, in conclusion, "and play fairy godfather for Jonesy henceforth and for ever. One night, when Keith came up to confess some mischief he had been into during the day, he said:

"'Aunt Allison, this wearing the white flower of a blameless life isn't as easy as it is cracked up to be; but having this little pin helps a lot. I just put my hand on that like the real knights used to do on their sword-hilts, and repeat my motto. It will be easier when papa comes home. Since I've known Jonesy, and heard him tell about the hard times some people have that he knows, it seems to me there's an awful lot of wrong in the world for somebody to set right. Some nights I can hardly go to sleep for thinking about it, and wishing that I were grown up so that I could begin to do my part. I wish papa could be here now. He'd make a splendid knight; he is so big and good and handsome. I don't s'pose

King Arthur himself was any better or braver than my father is.'"

A tear splashed down from the mother's eyes as she listened, and, falling on the tiny white flower as it lay in her husband's hand, glistened beside the dewdrop centre like another diamond.

"Oh, Sydney!" she exclaimed, in a heart-broken way. Something very like a sob shook the man's broad shoulders, and, turning abruptly, he strode out of the room.

Down in the dim, green library, where the blinds had been drawn to keep it cool, he threw himself into a chair beside the table. Propping Keith's picture up in front of him against a pile of books, he leaned forward, gazing at it earnestly. He had never realised before how much he loved the little son, who hour by hour seemed slowly slipping farther away from him. The pictured face looked full into his as if it would speak. It wore the same sweet, trustful expression that had

shone there the night he talked to Jonesy of the Hall of the Shields; the same childish purity that had moved the old professor to lay his hands upon his head and call him Galahad.

All that gentle birth, college breeding, wealth, and travel could give a man were Sydney MacIntyre's, and yet, measuring himself by Keith's standard of knighthood, he felt himself sadly lacking. He had given liberally to charities hundreds of dollars, because it was often easier for him to write out a check than to listen to somebody's tale of suffering. But aside from that he had left the old world to wag on as best it could, with its grievous load of wrong and sorrow.

A man is not apt to trouble himself as to how it wags for those outside his circle of friends, when the generations before him have spent their time laying up a fortune for him to enjoy. But this man was beginning

to trouble himself about it now, as he paced restlessly up and down the room. He was not thinking now about the things that usually occupied him, his social duties, his home or club, or yacht or horses or kennels. He was not planning some new pleasure for his friends or family, he was wondering what he could do to be worthy of the exalted regard in which he was held by his little sons. What wrong could he set right, to prove himself really as noble as they thought him? He was their ideal of all that was generous and manly, and yet —

"What have I ever done," he asked himself, "to make them think so? If I were to be taken out of the world to-morrow, I would be leaving it exactly as I found it. Who could point to my coffin and say, 'Laws are better, politics are purer, or times are not so hard for the masses now, because this one man willed to lift up his fellows as far as the might of one strong life can

reach?' But they will say that of Malcolm, and Keith, if he lives — ah, if he lives!"

An hour later the door opened, and Malcolm came in, softly. "Keith is asking for you, papa," he said, with a timid glance into his father's haggard face. Then he came nearer, and slipped his hand into the man's strong fingers, and together they went up the stairs to answer the summons.

"Did you want me, Keith?"

The head did not turn on the pillow. The languid eyes opened only half-way, but there was recognition in them now, and one little hand was raised to lay itself lovingly against his father's cheek.

"What is it, son?"

The weak little voice tried to answer, but the words came only in gasps. "Brother knows — about Jonesy — keep him from being a tramp! Please let me, papa — do that much good — in my life, 'else wherefore — born?'"

"What is it, Keith?" asked his father, bending over him. "Papa doesn't exactly understand. But you can have anything you want, my boy. Anything! I'll do whatever you ask."

"Malcolm knows," was the answer. Then the voice seemed somewhat stronger for an instant, and a faint smile touched Keith's lips. "Give my half of the bear to Ginger. Now — may I have — my — white — flower?"

Throwing back his coat, his father unpinned the little badge from his vest, where he had fastened it for safe-keeping a short time before in the library. A pleased expression flitted over the child's face, as he saw where it had been resting, and when it was fastened in the front of his little embroidered nightshirt, his hand closed over the pin as if it were something very precious, and he were afraid of losing it again.

"Wearing the white flower," they heard

him whisper, and then the little knight slept.

It was hours afterward when he roused again, — hours when the faintest noise had not been allowed in the house; when the servants had been sent to the cottage, and Unc' Henry stationed at the front gate, that no one might drive up the avenue.

Virginia, in a hammock on the veranda, scarcely dared draw a deep breath till she heard the doctor coming down the stairs, just before dark. Then she knew by his face that prayers and skill and tender nursing had not been in vain, and that Keith would live.

So much can happen in a week. In the seven days that followed Keith gradually grew strong enough to be propped up in bed a little while at a time; Captain Dudley and his wife came home from Cuba, and Mr. MacIntyre began to carry out the promise

he had made to Keith that day when they feared most he could not live.

The whole Valley rejoiced in the first and second happenings, and were too much occupied in them to notice the third. Carriages rolled in and out of the great entrance gate all day long, for Mrs. Dudley had always been a favourite with the old neighbours, and they gave a warm welcome to her and her gallant husband. Virginia followed her father and mother about like a loving shadow, and Keith was so interested in the wonderful stories they told of their Cuban experiences that he never noticed how much his father and Malcolm were away from home. Sometimes they would be gone all day together, consulting with the old professor, overseeing carpenters, or making hasty trips to the city. Jonesy's home, that had been so long only a beautiful aircastle, was rapidly taking shape in wood and stone, and the painters would soon be at work on it.

Mr. MacIntyre had never been more surprised than he was when Malcolm unfolded their plan to him. It did not seem possible that two children could have thought of it all, and arranged every detail without the help of some older head.

"It just grew," said Malcolm, in explanation. "First Keith said how lovely it would have been if we had made enough money at the Benefit to have bought a home for Jonesy in the country, where he could have a fair chance to grow up a good man. Just a comfortable little cottage with a garden, where he could be out-of-doors all the time, instead of in the dirty city streets; then nobody could call him a 'child of the slums' any more. Then we said it would be better if there were some fields back of the garden, so that he could learn to be a farmer when he was older, and have some way to make a living. We talked about it every night when we went to bed, and kept putting a

little more and a little more to it, until it was as real to us as if we had truly seen such a place. There were vines on the porches, and a big Newfoundland dog on the front steps, and a cow and calf in the pasture, and a gentle old horse that could plough and that Jonesy could ride to water.

"We told Ginger, and she thought of a lot more things; some little speckled pigs in a pen, and kittens in the hay-mow, and ducks on the pond, and an orchard, and roses in the yard. She said we ought to call the place 'Fairchance,' because that's what it would mean for Jonesy and Barney (you know we would send for Barney first thing we did, of course), and it was Ginger who first thought of getting some nice man and his wife to take care of the boys. She said there were plenty of people who would be glad to do it, just for the sake of having such a good home. Ginger said if we could do all that, and keep Jonesy and his brother

from growing up to be tramps like the man we bought the bear from, it would be serving our country just as much as if we went to war and fought for it. Ginger is a crank about being a patriot. You ought to hear her talk about it. And Aunt Allison said that 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,' and that to build such a place as our 'Fairchance' would be a deed worthy of any true knight."

"How are you expecting to bring this wonderful thing to pass?" asked his father, as Malcolm stopped to take breath. "Do you expect to wave a wand and see it spring up out of the earth?"

"Of course not, papa!" said Malcolm, a little provoked by his father's teasing smile. "We were going to ask you to let us take the money that grandfather left us in his will. We won't need it when we are grown, for we can earn plenty ourselves then, and it seems too bad to have it laid away doing

nobody any good, when we need it so much now to right this wrong of Jonesy's."

"But it is not laid away," answered Mr. MacIntyre. "It is invested in such a way that it is earning you more money every year; and more than that, it was left in trust for you, so that it cannot be touched until you are twenty-one."

"Oh, papa!" cried Malcolm, bitterly disappointed. He had hard work to keep back the tears for a moment; then a happy thought made his face brighten. "You could lend us the money, and we would pay you back when we are of age. You know you promised Keith you would do anything he wanted, and that is what he was trying to ask for?"

Mr. MacIntyre put his arm around the earnest little fellow, and drew him to his knee, smiling down into the upturned face that waited eagerly for his answer.

"I only asked that to hear what you

would say, my son," was the answer. "You need have no worry about the money. I'll keep my promise to Keith, and Jonesy shall have his home. I'm not a knight, but I'm proud to be the father of two such valiant champions. Please God, you'll not be alone in your battles after this, to right the world's wrongs. I'll be your faithful squire, or, as we'd say in these days, a sort of silent partner in the enterprise."

Several days after this a deed was recorded in the county court-house, conveying a large piece of property from old Colonel Lloyd to Malcolm and Keith MacIntyre. It was the place adjoining "The Locusts," on which stood a fine old homestead that had been vacant for several years. The day after its purchase a force of carpenters and painters were set to work, and two coloured men began clearing out the tangle of bushes in the long-neglected garden.

Jonesy knew nothing of what was going

on, and wondered at the long conversations which took place between the old professor and Mr. MacIntyre, always in German. It was the professor who found some one to take care of the home, as Virginia had suggested. He recommended a countryman of his, Carl Sudsberger, who had long been a teacher like himself. He was a gentle old soul who loved children and understood them, and a more motherly creature than his wife could not well be imagined. Everything throve under her thrifty management, and she had no patience with laziness or waste. Any boy in whose bringing up she had a hand would be able to make his way in the world when the time came for it.

Mrs. Dudley and Miss Allison helped choose the furnishings, but Virginia felt that the pleasure of it was all hers, for she was taken to the city every time they went, and allowed a voice in everything. Several trips were necessary before the house was

complete, but by the last week in May it was ready from attic to cellar.

It was the "Fairchance" that the boys had planned so long, with its rose-bordered paths, the orchard and garden and outlying fields. Nothing had been forgotten, from the big Newfoundland dog on the doorstep, to the ducks on the pond, and the little speckled pigs in the pen. The day that Keith was able to walk down-stairs for the first time, Mr. MacIntyre went to Chicago, taking Jonesy with him, to find Barney and bring him back. He was gone several days, and when he returned there were three boys with him instead of two: Jonesy, Barney, and a little fellow about five years old, still in dresses.

Malcolm met them at the train, and eyed the small newcomer with curiosity. "It is a little chap that Barney had taken under his wing," explained Mr. MacIntyre. "It's mother was dead, and I found it was entirely

dependent on Barney for support. They slept together in the same cellar, and shared whatever he happened to earn, just as Jonesy did. I hadn't the heart to leave him behind, although I didn't relish the idea of travelling with such a kindergarten. Would you believe it, Dodds (that's the little fellow's name) never saw a tree in his life until yesterday? He had never been out of the slums where he was born, not even to the avenues of the city where he could have seen them. It was too far for him to walk alone, and street-cars were out of the question for him, — as much out of reach of his empty pockets as the moon."

"Never saw a tree!" echoed Malcolm, with a thrill of horror in his voice that a life could be so bare in its knowledge of beauty. "Oh, papa, how much 'Fairchance' will mean to him, then! Oh, I'm so glad, and Keith — why, Keith will want to stand on his head!"

They drove directly to the new place. It

was late in the afternoon, and the sunshine threw long, waving shadows across the yard. Mrs. Sudsberger sat on the front porch knitting. A warm breeze blowing in from the garden stirred the white window curtains behind her with soft flutterings. The coloured woman in the kitchen was singing as she moved around preparing supper, and her voice floated cheerily around the corner of the house:

"Swing low sweet chariot, comin' fer to carry me home,
Swing low, sweet char-i-ot, comin' fer to carry me home!"

A Jersey cow lowed at the pasture bars, and from away over in the woodland came the cooing of a dove. Three little waifs had found a home.

Mr. MacIntyre looked from the commonplace countenances of the boys climbing out of the carriage to Malcolm's noble face. "It is a doubtful experiment," he said to himself. "They may never amount to anything, but at least they shall have a chance to see what

clean, honest, country living can do for them." And then there swept across his heart, with a warm, generous rush, the impulse to do as much for every other unfortunate child he could reach, whose only heritage is the poverty and crime of city slums. He had seen so much in that one short visit. The misery of it haunted him, and it was with a happiness as boyish and keen as Malcolm's that he led these children he had rescued into the home that was to be theirs henceforth.

Keith did not see "Fairchance" until Memorial Day. Then they took him over in the carriage in the afternoon, and showed him every nook and corner of the place. There were six boys there now, for room had been made for two little fellows from Louisville, whom Mr. MacIntyre had found at the Newsboys' Home. "I've no doubt but that there'll always be more coming," he said to Mr. Sudsberger, with a smile, as

he led them in. "When you once let a little water trickle through the dyke, the whole sea is apt to come pouring in."

"Happy the heart that is swept with such high tides," answered the old German. "It is left the richer by such floods."

Several families in the Valley were invited to come late in the afternoon to a flag-raising. The great silk flag was Virginia's gift, and Captain Dudley made the presentation speech. He wore his uniform in honour of the occasion. This was a part of what he said:

"This Memorial Day, throughout this widespread land of ours, over every mound that marks a soldier's dust, some hand is stretched to drop a flower in tender tribute. Over her heroic dead a grateful country wreathes the red of her roses, the white of her lilies, and the blue of her forget-me-nots, repeating even in the sweet syllables of the flowers the symbol of her patriotism, — the

red, white, and blue, of her war-stained banner.

"My friends, I have followed the old flag into more than one battle. I have seen men charge after it through blinding smoke and hail of bullets, and I have seen them die for it. No one feels more deeply than I what a glorious thing it is to die for one's country, but I want to say to these little lads looking up at this great flag fluttering over us, that it is not half so noble, half so brave, as to live for it, to give yourselves in untiring, every-day living to your country's good. To 'let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's, thy God's, and truth's.' I would rather have that said of me, that I did that, than to be the greatest general of my day. I would rather be the founder of homes like this one than to manœuvre successfully the greatest battles.

"May the 'Two Little Knights of Kentucky' go on, out through the land, carrying

their motto with them, until the last wrong is righted, and wherever the old flag floats a 'fair chance' may be found for every one that lives beneath it. And may these Stars and Stripes, as they rise and fall on the winds of this peaceful valley, whisper continuously that same motto, until its lessons of truth and purity and unselfish service have been blazoned on the hearts of every boy who calls this home. May it help to make him a true knight in his country's cause."

There was music after that, and then old Colonel Lloyd made a speech, and Virginia and the Little Colonel gathered roses out of the old garden, so that every one could wear a bunch. A little later they had supper on the lawn, picnic fashion, and then drove home in the cool of the evening, when all the meadows were full of soft flashings from the fairy torches of a million fireflies.

With Keith safely covered up in a ham-

mock, they lingered on the porch long after the stars came out, and the dew lay heavy on the roses. They were building other air-castles now, to be rebuilt some day, as Jonesy's home had been; only these were still larger and better. The older people were planning, too, and all the good that grew out of that quiet evening talk can never be known until that day comes when the King shall read all the names in his Hall of the Shields.

"It has been such a beautiful day," said Virginia, leaning her head happily against her mother's shoulder. Then she started up, suddenly remembering something. "Oh, papa!" she cried, "let's end it as they do at the fort, with the bugle-call. I'll run and get my old bugle, and you play 'taps.'"

A few minutes later the silvery notes went floating out on the warm night air, through all the peaceful valley; over the mounds in the little churchyard, wreathed now with

their fresh memorial roses; past "The Locusts" where the Little Colonel lay a-dreaming. Over the woods and fields they floated, until they reached the flag that kept its fluttering vigil over "Fairchance."

Jonesy sat up in bed to listen. Many a reveille would sound before his full awakening to all that the two little knights had made possible for him, but the sweet, dim dream of the future that stole into his grateful little heart was an earnest of what was in store for him. Then the bugle-call, falling through the starlight like a benediction, closed the happy day with its peaceful "Good night."

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